

COMMUNITY ACTION

No.24 Feb/March 1976 18p

COUNCIL HOUSING UNDER ATTACK



CONTENTS

NEWS & VIEWS	3
Cuts: The Five Year Fight	11
Action Report: COUNCIL HOUSING	13
An Interview with Jack Munday	29
Action Notes: Lobbying	32
Claimants Organise	34
Reports & Things	37
Letters	38

Community Action is an entirely independent non-profit magazine. All those involved are unpaid.

Editorial Group

Simon Kenrick
Philip Pearson
Peta Sissons
Dexter Whitfield

Thanks to the following for their help:
Tim Challans, Gill Davies, Bob Evans, Jenny Hilditch, Grainne Morby, Frances Oliver, John Ready, Nick Sharman, Maureen Smith, Nick Vermede, Terry Smith, Judy Viscardi, Carolyn Wiles. Many thanks also to all those who helped with information for the ACTION REPORT.
Printed by: Graham Andrews Web Offset Ltd.
39 Underwood Road, Reading.

Published by: Community Action
PO Box 665
London SW1X 8DZ
Tel: 01 235 3465 (evenings only)

FIGHT THE ATTACK ON COUNCIL HOUSING

Council housing is under attack again. The cuts in public spending announced in February's Public Expenditure White Paper hit council housing especially hard.

These cuts follow successive reductions in spending on improvements to older council property over the past year. The press and TV have joined in the attack with distorted reports on the cost of council housing and the "two-car council tenant".

Yet councils house one family in three in this country. They alone share out housing on the basis of need rather than profit. Whatever their faults, this is their key advantage.

We've produced the Action Report in this issue to defend the principle of council housing and to show what can be done to improve it.

The Report is in three parts - in this and the next two issues of the magazine. It's intended to provide practical help for tenants' groups and trade unionists.

We hope the Report will :

- Help tenants resist local attacks on council housing.
- Provide information on specific aspects of council housing to help tenants fight for their rights - e.g. proper provision of community facilities, repairs, etc.
- Help campaigns fighting the wider cuts in public spending.

NEWS & VIEWS

LEEDS

HUNSLET TENANTS FIGHT HEATING CRISIS

In the last two months tenants in part of Leeds have developed an organisation to fight the corporation's heating schemes. All their meetings are open, and decisions are thrashed out by the full group.

In early January at the Hunslet Grange flats, the local community project opened an advice centre called the Hunslet Grange Electricity Exchange.

Sit-in planned

Its purpose was to help people landed with electricity bills of up to £90 and £100, and to encourage residents to suggest possible courses of action for dealing with the heating problems of the all-electric flats. The Exchange opened one night a week and was swamped with people. A surprising number of them had no immediate problem but were very fearful of the March bills, or resentful about paying high bills to

live in damp and draughty flats. By early February, there was a list of people willing to take action, and they met to discuss what could be done. They saw the immediate issue as the high heating costs caused by the inefficient central heating system, lack of repairs, and structural faults in the flats (which were built between 1966 & 1970).

Action demanded

The meeting sent a letter to the chairman of the Housing Committee, asking for a guarantee that the Committee would discuss and act on these problems when it next met.

The group asked for an answer by its next meeting in a week's time, and agreed that if no guarantee was given they would take direct action.

No reply was received by the deadline. The group decided on a sit-in at the local Rent Office on the morning of the Housing Committee meeting. The idea was for the group to occupy the Office while the Committee met, and impress on it the importance of taking immediate action.

HIRWAUN

PICKETS FORCE GAS TANKS TO NEW SITE



The Hirwaun Action Committee, which combines residents' and workers' organisations, are in their 32nd month of picketing the site in the village where the British Gas Corporation (BGC) wanted to build two large liquid natural gas tanks. (See C/A No. 11, p14; No. 16, p16)

Few affected

But victory is in sight. The BGC seems to have admitted defeat, and has applied for planning permission to build the tanks at Dynevor Arms, 3½ miles away. The Cynon Valley District Council and the County Council have agreed to give permission, but some objections are expected from environmental groups as the site is in the Brecon Beacons National Park. Only a pub is affected and the publican is willing to move. The nearest village, 3 miles away, held an inconclusive public meeting to discuss the issue.

The HAC intend to continue picketing until Welsh Gas give up the Hirwaun site and work starts on the new site.

Thanks to Paddy French, Rebbecca Magazine.



PHOTO: LEEDS OTHER PAPER

The advantage of this action was that being local, it was easier to organise in the six days before the Committee meeting. Also people could be asked to join in for a short time, and other residents could see that action was being taken.

Action group is born

A committee was elected from the main meeting to work out the details, with a full meeting to be held on the Monday night before the sit-in.

The group also decided to write to the members of the Housing Committee asking them to raise the matter at the meeting. That night the Hunslet Grange Heating Action Group (HGHAG) was born.

The HGHAG committee met on the Friday to discuss tactics and decide on a press-release and placards.

They also decided to have a petition at the Rent Office, to give people a way of showing support when they arrived. A delegation from the sit-in would then take the petition along to the Housing Committee meeting in the afternoon.

Council forewarned

But by Monday night the situation had changed :

- Both the Housing Dept and the Community Constable had told members of the group that they knew about the sit-in.

- A new lock had been fitted on the Rent Office manager's door.

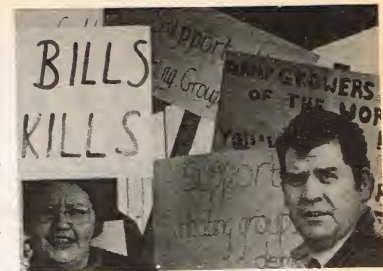
but more significantly :

- A letter had been received from the Housing Dept saying that the group's action was unreasonable, but it just so happened that a report on heating council houses was already on the agenda.

- A letter was received from the Shadow Chairman of the Housing Committee saying he was very sympathetic to the group and would see the problems were raised.

Demonstration planned

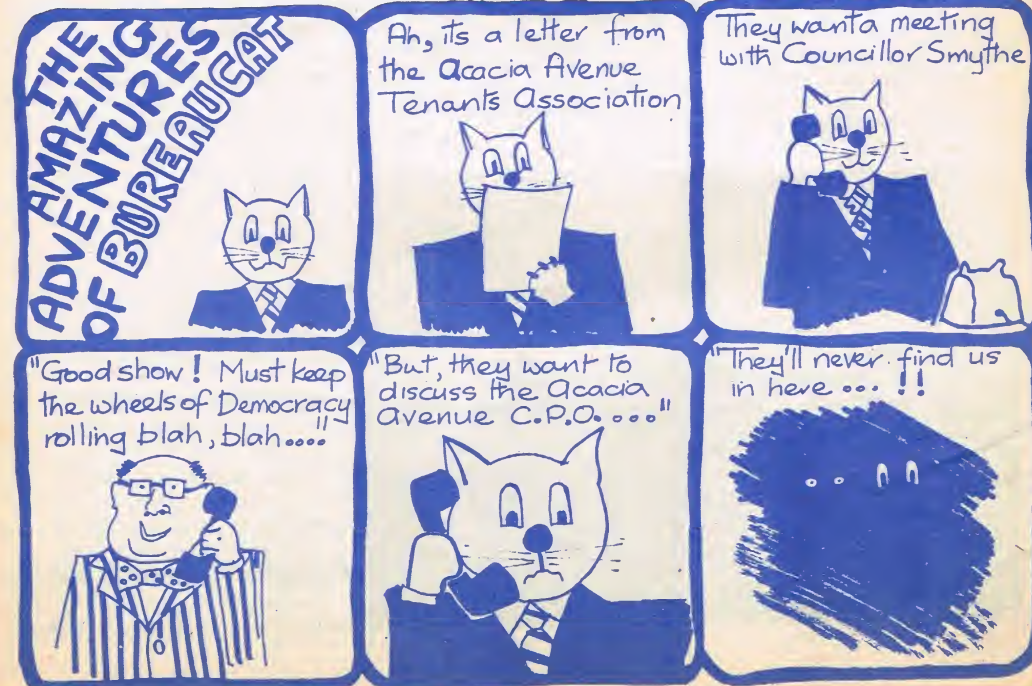
The Monday night meeting, after a long discussion, decided that now their problems were likely to be discussed they might do more harm than good by going ahead with the sit-in. They decided instead to hold a protest/demonstration outside the Rent Office.



The group would march on the Office at 9am, hand the manager a letter which now included more specific demands for action, and give each member of the staff a letter asking them to join the residents in their protest. The group would remain outside till 12 noon, gathering signatures for the petition. A delegation would then go to the Housing Committee meeting. All 1250 flats were leafleted, asking residents to come along to the protest and sign the petition. Monday night ended with a tour of the local media to deliver press-releases.

Good press coverage

On Tuesday morning, a respectable force gathered in one of the estate's car-parks, collected the placards and marched



on the Rent Office. Letters were handed in and the group set about collecting signatures for the petition. The press, radio and TV arrived - all had difficulty with the fact that no-one was in charge!

Nevertheless the group got extensive favourable coverage. Later in the morning some residents toured the flats and local shops to get more signatures - in 3 hours, 698 were collected.

After lunch six residents took the petition to the Housing Committee meeting. They also gave each member of the Committee a letter stating what had happened in the morning, why it had been done, and asking that the item on council house heating be brought forward on the agenda.

Long wait

But the residents had to wait over three hours. In the meantime the evening paper had come out, giving front page coverage to the morning's activities. The residents brought this to the attention of the Committee members.

When the item was discussed the Committee seemed sympathetic, and mentioned the possibility of a subsidy on priority repairs for all-electric council housing right across the city.

But the final decision, after all the fine words, was to meet officials from the Yorkshire

Electricity Board and DHSS, and to lobby local MP's.

Campaign continues

At HGHAG's follow-up meeting, people expressed disappointment at the Housing Committee's inertia. The objectives agreed at the meeting for pursuing; the campaign were sent out as a press-release, and reported in the evening paper and local radio.

The group is now preparing for the next stage of the campaign.

HGHAG, c/o 52 Pottery Vale, Leeds IO.

LONDON

COMMUNITY HEALTH COUNCILS

Community Health Councils were introduced in 1974 as the first attempt to inject public participation into the National Health Service. They are intended to represent the interests of users of the National Health Service.

The members of a council are chosen from a variety of sources: one third are nominated by the local authority, one third chosen by voluntary groups and the remainder nominated by the regional health authority.

Many CHCs are in fact dominated by local authority councillors and representatives of traditional middle class pressure

groups but this is not always the case. One CHC with a difference is Wandsworth & East Merton CHC where over two thirds of the 30 members are representatives of 'grass roots' or community groups. This council has often spoken of the danger of CHCs being the sugar coating on a very unpleasant pill and is determined to resist cuts in local health services.

CHCs Conference

At a recent conference of London CHCs several important issues were raised:

The role CHCs should play in relation to the public spending cuts in the health service, and the present crisis in the NHS were hotly debated. Should all cuts be rejected in principle, or should some be accepted as a necessary "redistribution" of resources between different parts of the country?

Patient Power

The union officials present, from NUPE, COHSE, NALGO and the national NHS cuts committee implored CHCs to work more closely with the unions and trades councils in defending both patients and health workers from the cuts. When urged to find out more about hidden cuts in staffing, several CHC members admitted that they had no contact with the 'shop floor' health workers and would now try to make these contacts.

MORE EMPTY OFFICES

Remember the fact sheet on property investment by pension funds and insurance companies in C/A no.22,p23? A few weeks later the Government's Advisory Group on Commercial Property Development published its first report. It seems that property is still such a good investment that they've lost track of how much money they've put in! They miscalculated the pension funds investment in land and property by a cool £900m. The actual figures are Pension Funds - £1700m (and a further £254m in property unit trusts), Insurance Companies - £3904m (excluding £1471 in home loans).

And another piece of good news - the number of empty offices in the City of London keeps on increasing - 3,100,000 sq ft by the end of 1975 and a further 2,400,000 sq.ft empty on the fringes of the City.



The Minister of Health, David Owen, has refused to allow CHCs to be represented on a new body set up by DHSS - the London Coordinating Committee - to review "needs and health resources in inner London". The CHCs saw themselves as obvious participants in this review and were angry at being excluded.

One speaker argued that CHCs had a positive role to play in giving patients an active 'partnership' in the whole health industry and suggested that patients could form a union to provide a power base and be represented on CHCs.

Report available

A working party was elected from the conference to draw up a programme of aims and guidelines for a proposed London Association of CHCs.

Anyone who wants a free copy of "Patient Power"- the first report of our CHC- should contact: Caroline Langridge, Wandsworth and East Merton CHC, 1 Balham Station Road, London SW12 9SG. Tel. 01-673 8820

(There will be a longer article on CHCs in the next issue.)

COVENTRY

RESIDENTS PRODUCE A VIDEO FILM REPORT

The sections of the Housing Act 1974 which oblige Local Authorities to 'consider' reports calling for the declaration of a particular area as a Housing Action Area (HAA) or General Improvement Area do not go on to specify that such reports have to be written ones.

Why use video ?

Vine Street Residents Association of Hillfields, Coventry recently exploited this fact to produce a video-film report demanding HAA status for their street. They found this technique had a number of advantages:

- All residents could be involved in the production of the

final document. The film was shown a number of times to check with the whole street that it said what they wanted it to say - new details were easily added.

- It prevented their campaign from being reduced to a technical document without political clout.

- It was short and interesting enough to show to raise support from other groups in the city.

- In order to 'consider' this



report, Councillors had to watch the thing through. All the group's arguments could be included and receive detailed attention. Similarly the reality of the area's housing and environmental conditions confronted the Councillors in the lush setting of their Council chambers.

- It had its own publicity value.

- It can be used again to spread the campaign to a wider area.

- It was good fun to produce and an event in its own right!

A film can say more

In producing the film and deciding on its content the group had to consider each element of the situation, decide on a common view and a means to represent it. In this way the final film had to say something about the wider neighbourhood (an older working-class neighbourhood in the City suffering repeated threats of redevelopment since 1951) and why and how its function was changing from residential to office and business use.

The group doesn't pretend that a film of this type can substitute for good organisation and representativeness, but it did help in promoting this and, for the purpose of preparing a report, it was more 'accessible' for the group as a whole than writing a report.

The Association is in the process of preparing a full history of its campaign to date. The area has just been declar-

ed a Housing Action Area - there are still some points to be won. The group wants the HAA to be followed immediately by a General Improvement Area to get the maximum cash possible for the area and a secure 30 year life for the houses.

Anyone who would be interested in a copy of the report when it is ready (it will cost about 50p) or in renting a copy of the video film should contact: Vine Street Residents Association, c/o 91 Vine Street Hillfields, Coventry; or Coventry Workshop, 40 Binley Road, Coventry. Tel. 22696.

LONDON

TENANTS WIN TRUNK ROAD BATTLE

As a result of our campaign to stop the A11 trunk road being re-routed through the middle of our council estate (see CA no.22,p6) we have won our battle on three fronts.

March against rent increases

Westminster Council Tenants Rents Action Committee
March on Saturday 27th March 12.30pm Trafalgar Square to
10 Downing Street

Supported by Council tenants associations throughout Westminster and London, Westminster Trades Council, local trade unions and community groups.

Westminster Council has voted to put rents up by 66p average and £3 maximum from 1 April. These scandalous increases are repeated in other London boroughs. So far the Government has said the increases are "fair" and close to what they have recommended!

HELP FIGHT THE RENT INCREASES ! SUPPORT THE 27th March DEMONSTRATION!

Further information from Kay McNicholas, 510 Centre, 510 Harrow Road, London W9.



Firstly, the road scheme has been postponed until at least 1980, by which time the Greater London Council and Newham Council will have had to re-think completely their traffic plans. Before our campaign started, the scheme was finalised and ready to start next year.

Committee ignores own survey

Secondly, the Housing Committee have recommended immediate rehousing for all those families, with children, who already want to move because of the existing traffic danger. The Committee agreed to ignore the results of its own council officers' survey of tenants' rehousing needs, because a number of tenants had been told by the officers that they would be given only one offer. This had obviously scared some tenants into saying they would rather stay where they were, even if the road scheme went ahead.

Finally, we have shown the council that they can't get away with making decisions which will make life hell for tenants, without expecting the tenants to fight back. As one councillor said: "We don't want to do battle with you again - we can see what we are up against."

Great Eastern Road Tenants Association, c/o 41 Oxford Road, London E.15.

BIRMINGHAM

THE FIRST 'GREEN BAN' CAMPAIGN

Building workers and other trade unionists, together with environmental groups, in Birmingham are moving towards imposing a "Green Ban" on a £10m. office development in the city centre. "Green-Bans" have been developed by Australian building workers as a way of blocking anti-social developments (see page 29 for an interview with Jack Munday, Australian building workers leader- also CA no. 10 p. 35)

Action committee

Following a meeting early in January organised by the Building Workers' Charter, a 12-person Green Ban Action Committee was formed to ask workers to use their

industrial strength to.

- stop demolition of buildings of historic or architectural interest;
- prevent harmful projects;
- discuss with workers the social usefulness of their labour.

The immediate concern of the Action Committee is the 300,000 sq. ft. office development which involves demolition and replacement of the Central Post Office, a historic building. There are already 2m. sq. ft. of empty offices in Birmingham and another 5m. sq. ft. under construction or planned.

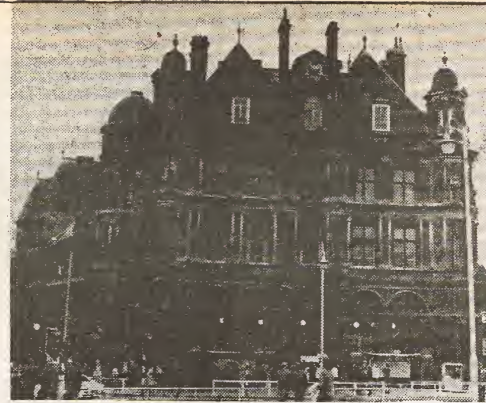
Supported by unions

The Action Committee already have the support of both local and regional committees of UCATT, plus backing from TWGU, AUEW and discussions are going on with NALGO, NUPE, TASS, and EPTU. It is

New Community Newspapers

CLEAR THE AIR is produced by the Newham Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations. The first issue deals with the loss of jobs, housing cuts and other news. 5p + postage from c/o 50 Stubbs Point, New Barn Street, London E.13.

LONDON TENANT is the new monthly paper of the Association of London Housing Estates which has expanded from being a newsletter. 5p + postage from ALHE, 17 Victoria Park Square, London E2.



Birmingham's Victorian post office

anticipated that both the East Midlands TUC and the Birmingham Trades Council will give their support next week. Several environmental groups are also involved.

A petition demanding that the Post Office building be saved and modernised and the scrapping of the new office scheme has had a massive response. Factory committees and ward Labour parties have also passed resolutions in support. 42 county councillors have signed the petition so far.

Homes before offices

The Post Office development wouldn't really help to solve the unemployment in the building industry, because it would require only a relatively small highly skilled labour force. However, £10m. spent on housing would not only provide many more jobs for building workers but would also help to reduce the 30,000 housing waiting list.

The campaign has been attacked as a "type of fascism and extreme communism" by Sir Frank Price, the former Lord Mayor of Birmingham. He is also a partner in Comprehensive Development Associates, the consultancy firm retained by the Post Office to plan the scheme. Ex-

actly the same kind of attacks were made on the Australian building workers.

A mass picket is to be held in Birmingham on 13th March to collect more signatures on the petition. The following week, 20th March, a demonstration is planned, involving trade unions, resident groups and environmental groups.

Further information from Green Ban Action Committee, Val Stevens, Chairperson, 77 School Rd., Hall Green, Birmingham 28.

COVENTRY

SCRAP THE ROAD SCHEME

Gulson Action Committee (GAC) was formed just over a year ago to fight a major new road scheme which, with proposed warehouse development, threatened the area's 600 houses with demolition.

Saving face

The scheme was first proposed in 1966 but its implementation was repeatedly postponed. The resulting blight prevented many people from modernising their homes. Rented houses especially began to fall into disrepair, houses were boarded up and anyone who could moved out of the area.

The committee has worked consistently for twelve months to build up a case for the scrapping of the road. This involved exploring the relationship between Coventry District Council and the West Midlands Metropolitan Council. Since re-organisation the responsibility for major roads transferred to the larger authority and no precedents existed locally for negotiating with this body.

The committee were able to persuade the controlling Labour group on the District Council of the merits of their case and a temporary alliance was formed in order to present a joint case to the West Midlands Council. This was supported by a mass petition of over 700 signatures from the area's residents.

Concessions

They found that the County Authority was favourably inclined towards a scheme that would save money (the County had 'only' £4m to spend on roads in the West Midlands - Coventry alone had proposed £34m worth of road schemes!).

The major problem continues to be the Council's need to devise a face saving way of scrapping the project nine years after deciding it was vital.

While devising such a way out the W.M. Council has guaranteed a minimum 12 year life for the area. This will allow owners to sell their houses to the Council under the blight provisions of the planning acts as well as allow the Council to pay improvement grants to anyone who finds the prospect of a 12 year life an incentive to undertake improvements.

Keeping the pressure on

The GAC has increasingly developed a representative role in the area taking on issues like repairs and imp-

movements to both privately rented and council houses, opposing cuts in public expenditure and the improvement of environmental conditions in the area. A series of Section 99 actions under the Public Health Act 1936 are in the pipeline - in the main these relate to houses acquired by the council for homeless families.

This combined with their moves towards demanding Housing Action Area/General Improvement Area status are felt to be the best way of ensuring that the road scheme is finally scrapped and a positive policy towards the area is adopted.

A more detailed report of the campaign will follow in a later issue.

Gulson Action Committee, c/o 13 Vecqueray Street, Stoke, Coventry.

GLASGOW ANTI-DAMPNESS CAMPAIGN

Council tenants in the Gorbals area of Glasgow are preparing to take Glasgow District Council to court over the problem of dampness in their three-year-old flats. This action is the culmination of a campaign of demonstrations, publicity, lobbying and public meetings. The Council has - predictably - blamed the problem on "condensation" caused by the living habits of the tenants, ignoring the design faults and lack of insulation caused by building on the cheap. A Council "condensation" exhibition provoked pickets from angry tenants. Now that tenants are preparing architectural and medical evidence for court action, the Council has adopted a policy of complete non-cooperation, and have refused to release plans

and documents or talk with campaign members. A full report on the campaign will appear in the next issue of Community Action.

Gorbals Anti-Dampness Campaign, Mr Friel, 52-60 Sandiefield Rd., Gorbals, Glasgow.

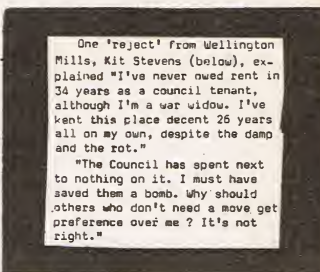
LONDON WELLINGTON MILLS CO-OP - A COUNCIL SHOWPIECE ?

A recent attempt by the GLC to impose a housing co-operative on a new estate in North Lambeth without consulting the local community has met with powerful resistance from local action groups and Lambeth councillors.

The Wellington Mills estate, the first new council development in the area for 20 years, was almost complete before the intention to set up a co-operative was announced. The need for good housing is desperate in this neglected part of the borough. Most council tenants are in badly maintained pre-war flats or pre-fabs built after bomb damage or bungled clearance programmes. Many looked to the 138 new homes in Wellington Mills as a lifeline to better housing, while retaining links with what is still a fairly strong working-class community.

Experimenting with tenants

In mid-October 1975, the GLC invited 200 tenants on their transfer list to a meeting at County Hall. Here, they listened to Tony Judge, Chairman of the Housing Management Committee, describe the proposals as an important experiment in housing management "which would be watched with very great interest by a great many people".



This charade of public consultation ignored a large number of residents in clearance areas who had been promised rehousing but hadn't registered on the transfer list. It was followed by individual interviews with applicants.

Council manoeuvres

Local people suddenly discovered that officials were placing little importance on housing need. What mattered, if you wanted to get into Wellington Mills, was whether you were fit to become a "co-operator", and the GLC swiftly rejected anyone they



Gorbals residents demonstrate at the exhibition.



WELLINGTON MILLS ESTATE

thought wasn't up to it. Some of those turned away were elderly and disabled people who would benefit most from the specially designed access ramps included in the layout.

At the same time the GLC was making advances to people with direct experience in housing and tenants' organisations, and accepting those with a trade skill useful for maintenance in a co-operative.

Who decides

The Waterloo Action Centre and local community newspaper, "SE1", both took up cases of individual rejected applicants. Member organisations of the Association of Waterloo Groups organised a letter campaign to the GLC demanding more public discussion of this attempt to set up a co-operative showpiece. Lambeth's controlling Labour group of councillors rejected the scheme and put pressure on the GLC to agree that Lambeth's allocation of 50 nominations should be made on the basis of need. Local GLC councillors began to question the way in which the decision to set up a co-op on the barely completed estate had been manoeuvred through council committees by Tony Judge and Richard Balfe (Chairman of the Housing Committee) without real discussion or debate.

Pattern for the future

The GLC was now on the defensive. Leader Sir Reg Goodwin wrote to the Waterloo Development Group denying charges of selecting an elite and ignoring housing need. "Far from it", wrote Sir Reg, "those invited were predominantly

GLC tenants having some degree of housing need for one reason or another (often medical and known only to the GLC)"!!! Behind the generally paternalistic tone of his letter lay the implication that those who had first proved themselves to be good maintainers of council property had a priority for new dwellings, and that people in immediate housing stress could be dealt with by the allocation of older council property.

Some concessions won

Public pressure has forced the GLC to make practical concessions on Wellington Mills. Individual rejection cases are being reconsidered and the Lambeth nominations will be made on the basis of

need. A concrete assurance has been given that there will be no private equity ownership of property within the co-operative.

Fashionable

General issues remain, however. The imposition of a co-operative from above without genuine local consultation is a total denial of genuine co-operative principles. The attempt by the GLC to rationalise what has happened at Wellington Mills by reference to the success of the Stephen and Mathilda Co-op (see CA no.22) cannot be justified. The latter resulted from the demands of its occupants for control and is not a fashionable 'experiment' to save management and maintenance costs.

The irony of Wellington Mills is that local people have been fighting for years to preserve homes against planners' arguments that the area is unsuitable for family housing. They now find themselves ineligible for what is suddenly a GLC prestige project not a stone's throw from County Hall.

Thanks to Howard Simmons, Waterloo Action Centre, 14 Baylis Road, SE1.

Spotlight on Council Finance

Fifty representatives from London tenants groups and trades councils attended a Joint Dockland Action Group/Association of London Housing Estates sponsored conference on Councils' finance and the rates system on Feb. 28th.

The conference highlighted the role of Council and Government spending in helping the decline of inner city areas by failing to build up viable economies in these areas.

The regressive rate system (poorer areas pay out a bigger share of their income for Council services than richer areas) and the failure of the Govern-

ment to register the needs of declining areas was criticised.

The conference also looked at the way Councils decide their budgets in order to help groups make a more effective impact on spending decisions. It set up a working party to back local action on these issues and to comment on the Government's official report on rates when it's published in April.

It's hoped meetings elsewhere in the country can build up information on the rates system and its unfair effects on poorer areas - likely to become crucial as the cuts bite into Councils' spending.

Contact: Nick Sharman 01-790 8342

CUTS: THE FIVE YEAR FIGHT



Three thousand people protest Government cuts in spending in Birmingham after publication of the Public Expenditure White Paper.



Labour's Plans

Labour policy on public spending is now clear after publication on February 19 of their 5 year projection (the Public Expenditure White Paper) on top of their plans for this year's local government spending. The aim is to hold back public spending for the benefit of private industrialists.

This Year...

This year's Rate Support Grant (the Government's grant to councils) will pay for a smaller share of spending. So rates and rents will have to go up - rents will rise by at least 60p from March.

Total spending by councils will be the same next year as this - just over £10 billion (at November 1975 prices). This means cuts in existing as well as planned programmes. In order to stand still, spending has to be increased to cover schemes already started and increases in interest payments. Government circular 129/75 tells local authorities in outline how they should implement cuts.

Education

Although a 2% rise is allowed across the country this is mainly accounted for by shifts in population and demand for education. The Circular explicitly states "this margin is not intended to secure an improvement in services". In some cases there

should be reductions or 'economies', especially in school provision for under 5s and in areas where population is falling.

Social Services

Population changes and increased demand as unemployment rises and incomes fall means a rise in spending. But this will in fact be £5m less than the amount needed to continue services at planned levels. Once again, "There is no scope for general improvement in services in 1976/7".

Transport

This area will bear the heaviest cuts - nearly 8% in real terms. This means increases in bus fares greater than other price rises, reductions in road building (long overdue), increased car parking charges, and 10% cut in forecast spending on concessionary fares.

Police

Police officers are to go up (by over 100,000) though traffic wardens and non-uniform staff will be cut. Courts, Civil Defence and probation officers get hefty increases. The fire service and school crossing patrols are cut.

Housing

Rents should go up an average of 60p but management and maintenance must be held steady. The Circular says savings can be made by asking tenants to take responsibility for some maintenance and decoration. So council tenants will pay more for a worse service.

The Circular also makes it clear that local councils will have little room for manoeuvre if costs increase. There is to be a £480m cash limit on extra spending.

The Next Five Years

The Public Expenditure White Paper, released early each year shows how much money Government Departments can expect to spend over the next 5 years. This year's White Paper makes it clear that the Labour Government has abandoned its traditional belief in using a major part of economic growth to improve the public services.

Almost all the projected economic growth of the next five years (optimistically put at 3½% a year) will go to private hands. Labour hopes this - backed with expanded subsidies to industry - will lead to greater industrial investment.

There are 2 dangers. Firstly, in the absence of real public control these extra funds (as in the 1973 boom) may well be used to fuel unproductive investment (such as property) or go out of the country. Secondly, new investment may mean no more than rationalisation - new and bigger machines employing less men. So unemployment may well stay high even if there is a boom.

This is a classic Tory approach to 'curing' economic problems. And the worst aspect of it is that

Labour is asking people most in need to pay for this risky venture.

For the cuts in public spending will bite savagely into living standards. Education and transport take the biggest hammering - these two sectors contribute over a third of all cuts, over £1100m out of a total £3000m by 1978-9. This means higher school dinner charges, old buildings not replaced, class size staying steady or increasing, increased public transport fares and fewer services. Other environmental services take big cuts - housing by nearly £400m. This means rents increasing by £2-£3 per week (an increase of over a third) and less money for improvement and buying up old houses.

Other big cuts are in health care (£200m) (hospitals will be under pressure to close in some areas - so watch for early warning of plans) and in capital spending on state industries (£300m) which means even less investment in key services like electricity supply.

There is one sector which gets more - industry, over £150m more. While this is not as significant as changes in taxation which will favour industry, it shows how the Labour Government is thinking. It's using every means to boost industry's profits.

We pay for those profits - not just next year, but for at least the next 5 years.

..AND THE FIGHT'S BEGUN

Tyneside

November's conference on cuts and unemployment has led to the formation of a Tyneside-wide committee which is actively campaigning against closures and cuts in public spending. Three working groups covering housing, health and education and transport are investigating the local implications of the spending cuts. Demonstrations, petitions and lobbying over cuts - especially in nursery provision - have been organised during January and February. The main committee has formulated a general list of demands and is organising to bring in more groups, especially tenants associations. Additionally NUPE/NALGO/NUT are supporting a joint campaign against local cuts which lead to unemployment. Tyneside Action Committee, 85 Adelaide Terrace, Newcastle 4.

Tower Hamlets

Tower Hamlets Council has backed a local trade unionist and action group campaign to fight closures in the Borough. Tower Hamlets Action Committee on jobs was formed two months ago to fight the 15 year loss of jobs which has accelerated with the current recession. The announced closure of the West India Dock by a semi-public

body, the Port of London Authority, was the final straw. Up to 5000 jobs could be at risk in an area where unemployment is already nearly 13%, London's worst rate. A campaign bringing together dockers, building workers, clothing trades, white-collar unions with community groups has demonstrated against the PLA and plans action against other planned closures, including Bryant and May. Now Tower Hamlets Council has called a Towns meeting for March 16 to protest against growing unemployment in the Borough and in particular the closure of the area's last dock. Tower Hamlets Action Committee, c/o 58 Watney Street, London E.1.

Brighton

Another November conference - held by Brighton and Hove Trades Council - led to formulation of the Brighton Action Committee against the Cuts. So far it has 17 union and other affiliations. With the Trades Council it organised a demonstration against the cuts and against unemployment on January 31. Again the campaign declares opposition to all social expenditure cuts and unemployment and pledges defence of the trade union movement. Brighton Voice, 7 Victoria Road, Brighton.

ACTION REPORT

COUNCIL HOUSING

CONTENTS

IN THIS ISSUE

- Fight the new attack
- Its always been a struggle
- The housing market:
big business & you
- Why council housing is
important today
- Community facilities: places to
meet, play & relax

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

- Rents & subsidies: where your
money really goes
- Tenants rights
- Tenants control
- Planning, design & construction

IN ISSUE NO. 26

- 'Reforms' which threaten council
housing
- The property lobby
- Tenants organisation & action
- The struggle ahead

FIGHT THE NEW ATTACK

Council housing is under sharper attack than at any time in the last 20 years. New council building has fallen dramatically. Rents are rising faster than shop prices. Standards in new council houses are being cut. Money for repairs and improvements is being slashed.

Opponents of council housing are out to prove that State owned housing doesn't work. By pointing out the faults of a lot of council housing - rigid rules, poor materials, bad design and layout, lack of facilities, etc. - they hope to discredit the principle of council housing. Instead of pointing to ways the State system can be improved they seek money for housing associations, co-ops, equity sharing schemes and so on. More serious is the growing amount of public money that supports the private housing market,

Political motives

But the attack isn't just about money. It is also politically motivated. The Tories, Liberals (and) the right wing of the Labour Party and the interests they represent all want continued expansion of owner occupation.

The assault on council housing is being made on a broad front. Scurrilous attacks distorting or ignoring the facts have recently appeared in the 'Daily Mail', 'Sunday People', 'Observer' to

name but a few. Other like the 'Guardian', 'Financial Times', 'Daily Telegraph' are usually more subtle but have the same aims. These attacks are fuelled by the journals and reports issued by the land, property and building lobbies and the housing groups within the political parties. At the same time the Government is cutting housing expenditure and encouraging the private housing sector. Councils are implementing cuts and many are seeking ways of lowering standards.

Why attack now ?

The attack comes now because these same financial and political interests have always seen council housing as some kind of 'welfare benefit' which is only for those 'in need', 'at risk' and/or 'can't help themselves'. Any 'normal' family living in a council house is presented as 'living off the state'. These same interests support the government's economic strategy of wage restraint, unemployment and cuts in public spending. So council housing becomes a target for cuts, particularly if the private housing market, housing associations, etc. can be expanded at the same time. Another reason is that last year the Government set up a committee to review the finance of housing in Britain. Its report is expected shortly and will be followed by new legislation. The financial, property and building lobby have been giving evidence and pushing out propaganda in an attempt to prevent any changes which would affect the private housing market, e.g. reducing subsidies to owner occupiers.

Spending has fallen from £420m to £300m - over a quarter - in the last year; and it is planned to decrease further over the next few years.

★ Council buying of older property which landlords won't improve has been slashed.

★ Repairs and maintenance spending has been held back and there are several schemes which attempt to make tenants responsible for repairs.

★ Council rents have risen faster than retail prices. Since 1968 they have gone up 124%, while retail prices have gone up by 99%. Most rents have already gone up by 60-70p this year and will go up another £2.50 in the next two years because of Government cuts in subsidies.

Council housing is being attacked politically on three fronts.

★ Many politicians are concocting schemes to sell council houses. These range from Peter Walker's idea of giving tenants their homes to more serious schemes to sell off shares of the house to tenants (equity sharing schemes). Birmingham, Greater London Council and Southwark already have or plan such schemes.

★ The growth of the housing association movement has been dramatic - fuelled by support from both the Labour and Tory parties, critics of council housing and Government grants which have increased from £2.7m in 1974/75 to £350m in just two years! (see CA No 17).

★ The Government is now supporting other "voluntary" housing schemes. The recent Campbell Report recommended public support for tenants co-ops - and it now seems certain that more public money

Buy a share in your council house

Council house cutback threat

THE WORST THE BIG SPENDERS

Britain's crazy housing

VERDICT ON COUNCIL HOUSES

THE message is clear... It's time that Britain put its council house in order and the present system was changed.

WE MUST PICK AND CHOOSE WHO SHALL HAVE COUNCIL HOMES AND WE MUSTN'T CROOK TO HELP THOSE WHO CAN HELP THEMSELVES.

House owners fear a price slump from council tenant invasions

Offer half-price homes, says MP

subsidised housing is threatening to bring local government to financial disaster

With rare exceptions the State and vested interests have attempted to limit the amount of council housing to that which is absolutely necessary in order to give maximum scope for private enterprise.

The evidence

Government spending on council housing has been cut drastically:

★ By 1973 it had halved to 107,000 new houses. Although Labour brought the total up to 162,000 in 1975, it will not rise any further. And even this low building rate will only be at the expense of other sectors - improvements, rents, repairs etc.

★ Improvements to older council housing (275,000 lack all basic amenities) have been cut back.

will go to create 'privileged' estates with tenants responsible for management and repairs.

The only way ahead

So the economic crisis and the political assault on public spending are being used to attack the principles of council housing. This Action Report demonstrates that this is only the latest in a long history of attempts to cut back council housing. The Report shows that the private housing market has never been able to meet the needs of working class families. Council housing can and should meet the general housing needs of the country. It is right in principle. But only if we keep fighting will council housing be adequately provided.

ITS ALWAYS BEEN A STRUGGLE



Council housing has been cut many times before

Cuts have been made by the Tories and Labour alike as a result of pressure from financiers and industrialists to reduce public spending at times of economic crisis. At other times the Tories have cut subsidies for council house building in order to expand the private housing market.

The first cut

Council housing on any scale first started in 1919 with the first national subsidised house-building programme and a promise of 500,000 'Homes fit for heroes' in 3 years. The Government paid all losses in excess of a 1d rate levied by the local authority. This lasted until 1921 when the post-war boom ended, world prices and trade fell and unemployment reached 14% within the year. Rising building costs were blamed but these were falling by 1921. However, the City did not like the subsidies because there was no upper limit which would restrain Government spending. The first cut - and after only two years!

Private housing boom

The Tories re-introduced subsidies in 1923 but they were smaller and a local authority could only build if they could prove to the Government that private builders couldn't provide working-class housing. With Labour in power a year later subsidies were increased, contribution from the rates permitted again and with local authorities back in control new council building increased to over 100,000 a year by 1927. But in the same year the Tories reduced the subsidies.

Three years later Labour introduced slum clearance subsidies following an election pledge to tackle the problem of the slums. In 1933, following the financial crisis of the two previous years, sub-

sidies for building to meet the 1 million shortage of houses were stopped. Local authorities had to concentrate on slum clearance. Then came the massive boom in private housebuilding, financed by the increased funds of building societies and helped by stable prices and low interest rates.

Tories slash subsidies

After the war Labour returned to power with a commitment to build 240,000 council houses per year. The financial crisis in 1947 saw the Government bow to pressure from the City and the United States (who offered Marshall Aid) to cut public spending on housing and other social services and to divert it to industry.

Five years later the Tories increased subsidies, for although committed to owner-occupation they needed local authorities to build to reach their election pledge of 300,000 houses a year. Once this was reached they ruthlessly slashed subsidies in 1954. They were cut again two years later and local authorities were again to concentrate on slum clearance. Council housebuilding declined rapidly and there was a second boom in owner-occupation.

The 20-year periods after each war were very similar. First a relatively large council house-building programme which lasted only 2 years before being cut back, then a period when council building increased steadily only to be cut again and local authorities limited to slum clearance.

Labour cuts

The last 12 years have seen Labour return to power in 1964 and while they greatly increased Council building, reaching 204,000 new houses in 1967, they were now fully committed to supporting owner occupation. The City and the International Monetary Fund (as a 'condition' of loans) demanded cuts in public spending after devaluation in 1967 - so the building programme was cut, strict cost controls introduced and emphasis put on improvement - the cheaper alternative to slum clearance. Interest rates soared and the Tories brought in the 'Fair Rents' policy, revised and reduced sub-

173,730

**COUNCIL AND NEW TOWN
HOUSES HAVE BEEN SOLD
OFF SINCE 1960**

(excluding houses specifically
built for sale)

sidies to cut public spending and 'push' more tenants into owner occupation.

Labour took over again in 1974 after the house price and property boom, and then implemented the Tory proposals of a massive expansion of housing associations accompanied by new improvement policies. Council building started to increase again - but so did the waiting lists. Again it didn't last long because the City, industry, Government and trade unions combined to launch a series of cuts (with wage restraint and unemployment) in order to divert public money to make industry more 'profitable' and reduce inflation.

A running battle for tenants and workers

The earliest housing struggles were against private landlords, but tenants have found themselves more and more up against the local council and government policy.

These battles have always been crucial in forcing the state to provide better housing - in fact the first state subsidies back in 1919 would have been impossible without the famous Clydeside rent strike of 1915.

Before the First World War, parliamentary pressure had produced nothing but a series of Royal Commissions. Only a few councils were building homes for working people.

The Glasgow rent strike changed all that. Backed by the vital munitions workers, it forced the government to act against the landlords and bring in a Rent Restriction Act - the first rent control ever.

Three phase trick

But lower rents meant lower profits for landlords and builders. How could they be encouraged to build the Homes Fit for Heroes promised by Lloyd George? Returning servicemen were beginning to squat in empty properties. In 1919, the government brought in building subsidies for both public and private housing.

During the same period, several government inquiries were recommending state intervention in housing as a cure for social unrest.

In 1920 the Tories wanted to de-control rents. But their Intelligence Reports warned of rent-strikes of they gave the landlords a free hand, and in 1921 they phased the increases - 40% over three years. Only Clydeside responded - but with a five-year rent-strike!

In the 30's, the boost for owner-occupation went hand in hand with progressive de-control. By 1938/39 tenants had had enough. Spectacular rent-strikes against landlords in London's East End spread to many cities, including action against Tory councils like Birmingham. The government reinforced rent-control.

At this time financial deals between jerry-build-

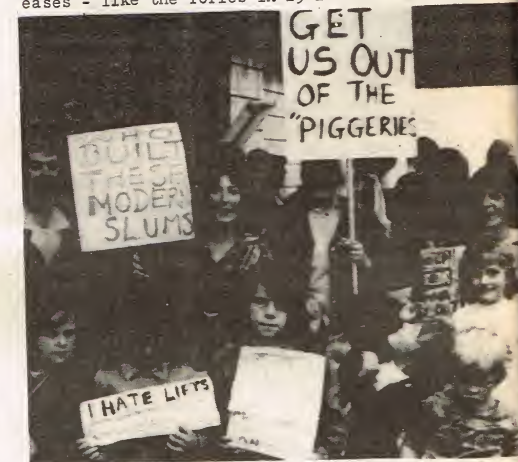
ers and building societies encouraged badly built houses. Militant action by new home-owners quickly produced protective legislation.

Squat for victory

The end of the war was marked by a massive squatting campaign, and the government had to introduce powers for local authorities to requisition empty properties.

Rent control continued under Labour, but the Tories returned to the attack in the mid-50's. In 1959-60 there was a long rent-strike against the Tory council in St Pancras, London. It was called off when the strikers decided that their best chance of reduced rents was to elect a Labour council. Labour was elected, but the new council was powerless against Tory government policy. A Labour council was no longer a guarantee of reasonable rents.

In 1968, dockers supported rent-strikes in East London against increases by the Tory Greater London Council. In 1969, with the threat of more strikes following Tory local election gains, the Labour government passed a law to phase the increases - like the Tories in 1921.



The worsening housing situation produced the London squatting campaigns of 1968/9 - again backed by trade unionists. Many councils were forced to make better use of their empty properties.

By this time working people were becoming involved in a wide variety of community struggles. The need for independent organisation was reinforced by the fight against the Tory Housing Finance Act.

In June 1972, Harold Wilson put pressure on Labour councils who were threatening not to implement the act - leaving Clay Cross to go it alone. The ensuing rent-strikes were slowly ground down. Now, under Labour, 50% rent increases will go with wage curbs and welfare cuts. The government is well-defended: cash-limits for councils, phased increases for tenants, and proposed new laws against squatters.

Will tenants and workers combine for the struggles ahead?

Subsidised council tenants - successive governments have subsidised owner occupiers, landlords and builders

Owner-occupiers receive subsidies in the form of tax concessions and grants. There are 3 tax concessions: a) tax relief on the interest payments of the mortgage; b) no tax is paid on the capital gain (difference between what it was bought and sold for) when a house is sold; c) no tax is paid on the equivalent of a rental income which owner benefits by living in the house ('Schedule A Tax' which was abolished in 1963). We describe these and council housing subsidies in detail in the next issue of C/A.

Unlimited relief

There has never been any limit on the total amount of tax relief in any one year nor on the amount an individual can claim - so those with the highest salaries and largest mortgages (first £25,000) benefit the most. Following the booms in owner-occupation in the 1930s and '50s tax relief reached £235m in 1969-70 but by 1975-6 it has soared to approximately £950m. In addition the option mortgage scheme (which provides cheaper mortgages for those who don't pay tax and therefore can't claim tax relief) has increased rapidly since it started in 1968 to £99m in 1975-6.

Builders subsidised

Private landlords and owner occupiers also receive improvement grants for converting or improving their houses. Although these grants were available from 1949 relatively few were taken up until the 1960s. Between 1964-9 the Government paid out £80m and a further £525m in the following 6 years - most of it going to owner occupiers. These grants improve living conditions but also increase the value of the house - for the entire benefit of the owner - and even the wealthy can get grants.

Private builders were actually paid to build houses for sale or rent between the wars. Starting in 1920 subsidies of a lump sum of £130-160 per house were available. There was a

limit on the size of the house but no controls on who could buy or occupy them or on the price. This subsidy was stopped in 1921 (when an attempt was made to increase it). Between 1923-29 builders were paid the same subsidies as local authorities, £6 a year for 20 years or £75 lump sum per house.

£525m

GIVEN TO OWNER OCCUPIERS
AND PRIVATE LANDLORDS
IN IMPROVEMENT GRANTS
1970-75

A total of 431,000 private houses, 15% of all the private houses built between 1919-39 were built using these subsidies. Since house prices during this period varied between £400-£1000 the subsidies were quite substantial. Because of the lack of controls, the low level of wages and high unemployment only about a third of these houses were occupied by working-class families.

Although private housebuilding isn't directly subsidised now many builders are bailed out by local authorities when they can't sell their completed houses. In 1974 local authorities bought up 10,000 houses started during the Tory house price boom but finished after the boom crashed. Prior to the boom the Government loaned local authorities £80m to provide sewage services to sites to speed up private development.



Mortgages subsidised

In 1973-4 the Government gave a grant of £15m and a loan of £500 to building societies to help them keep down mortgage interest rates.

Local authorities support owner-occupation by giving mortgages to individuals and on properties refused by the building societies. Local authority home loans reached £455m in 1974 and by the end of that year they were owed £1781m for mortgages and house improvement loans by owner occupiers.

The amount of public expenditure spent on private housing (option mortgage scheme; home loans and improvement grants) increased rapidly from 8% in 1969 to 21% within two years where it has since remained. It will be at least 18% for the next 4 years.

£1050m

IN TAX RELIEF AND OPTION
MORTGAGE SUBSIDIES TO
OWNER OCCUPIERS IN
ONE YEAR 1975/76

Always in the hands of the financiers

A local authority has to borrow money, usually 60 year loans, to pay for land and construction of council housing. Large profits are made by land-owners (the cost of land has soared to an average of £3,000 per house), financiers, builders (only a small percentage are built by direct works departments) and the building supply industries as the local authority competes in the market for these 'resources'.

The City's interest

The money is raised either through stocks, mortgages or bonds on the money market, i.e. in the City, or borrowed at lower interest rates from the Government's Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) which uses money from taxes and/or the Government's own borrowing from the City. By March 1975 the total local authority housing debt had reached £12,500m (52% of the total local authority debt), so the finance of council housing is big business. The 11 Discount Houses, who form part of the City and deal in Government, trade and local authority money, made £30m profit in the first 6 weeks of 1976!

Market price

Since 1919 different Governments have alternated between forcing local authorities to borrow on the open market, as they had to until 1939, or through the PWLB, as they did after the war (at 3% interest rate). In 1955 the Tories forced local authorities to compete in the money market again. Since 1964 between 30-50% of long term borrowing could be obtained from the PWLB - the advantage is that the Government can borrow at slightly lower interest rates than local authorities - but either way, exploitation by the money-lenders takes place.

£1400m

**APPROX. WILL BE PAID IN INTEREST
CHARGES IN THE FINANCIAL YEAR
1975/76 ON LOANS
FOR COUNCIL HOUSING**

which is more than all the rents
collected in England, Wales and
Scotland in the same year.

Interest rates on local authority loans have varied between 12-17% in recent years, compared with 11% on mortgages for owner-occupiers. Since 1933 each local authority has operated a consolidated loan fund; i.e. loans are raised through a general fund and not earmarked for a specific project. The 'pooling' of loans results in an average interest rate of about 10%, although this is rising as

councils borrow at the current high rate of interest. Owner-occupiers get cheap finance from those who save with building societies, and as a result of Government policy, e.g. the £500m loan at only 10½% interest rate (see p.17).

Interest charges currently represent 62% of all expenditure by local authorities from their Housing Revenue Accounts. Repayment of the actual loan accounts for only 8% of council spending, with repairs and management the remainder. The money paid into the account comes from 3 main sources: rents (44%), Government subsidies (43%) and contribution from the rates (13%).

Government subsidies to help pay for council housing have increased by 233% in five years to £1,275m in 1974-75. Interest charges have also more than doubled in the same five year period to nearly £1,400m. By 1978 13% of all public spending will be on interest charges - and council tenants will have to pay (in increased rents) most of the increase in interest charges relating to council housing because of the Government's cuts in subsidies.

Manipulation

Another important aspect of council housing is that since 1935 (apart from the brief period of the Housing Finance Act) rents have been set on the basis of pooled costs, i.e. rents of houses built some time ago when land and building costs were much cheaper help to keep down the rents of new houses. The control of finance is crucial. Whenever the Government has wanted to boost owner-occupation, subsidies to council housing have been stopped or drastically reduced (except for slum clearance), local councils stop or cut contributions from the rates, and the cost of borrowing money is increased by forcing local authorities to borrow on the money market.

The rise and fall of standards

The pressure is on to lower the standards of council housing at the same time as rents are going up. This isn't the first time it's happened, and as usual it goes with speeches about the need to "pull together". The enforcement of housing standards has a long history - going right back to the 1840s. For over half a century it was geared to "public health" and directed only against private housing.

Fit for heroes

But things changed after the First World War: among the spate of government inquiries provoked by the pre-war strike-wave and Glasgow rent struggles was the Tudor-Walters Committee.

It was ordered to find out how to build workers' housing quickly and cheaply. In

1918 it recommended self-contained cottages at 12 to the acre - with baths. Such 'luxury' aroused the wrath of the Conservatives, but the report was adopted, and in the '20s - under Labour at least - councils were able to build homes fit for working people. Many of the estates built then are still popular now.

Prefabs

But standards began falling almost immediately: from 850 sq. ft. for a 3-bedroom house in 1920 to around 750 sq. ft. for most of the '30s. In fact, 2/3 of all inter-war council housing had 3 bedrooms - excluding both small and large households. The emphasis shifted back to slum clearance, public health and the enforcement of minimum standards.

In 1944 the Dudley Committee recommended raising floor areas to 900 sq. ft. Then the hardy prefabs were introduced. After the war, Aneurin Bevan's tremendous drive for public housing was just as concerned with high standards as with numbers, and he resisted pressure to reduce them in 1947. But standards fell again all through the '50s under the Tories.



During this period the system of government subsidies encouraged the building of flats rather than houses, and increasingly high-rise blocks which profited few except the building firms big enough to take them on. Layout and design, then as now, frequently suffered the monotony that goes with shortage of cash and mass production.

In 1961 the Parker Morris Committee recommended generous space and heating standards for public and private housing. Eight years later it was made obligatory for council housing. But it clashed with the 'cost yardstick' (councils' spending limits for housing) which Labour had introduced two years before.

Reduced again?

The Report contained the prophetic line, "It is important that these minimum floor areas should not be taken as the maximum". This is exactly what has happened, and the pressure is now on to get them reduced.

Labour, in fact, has increasingly followed the Tory path. The 1974 Housing Act was drawn up by the Tories and passed almost intact by Labour. Under this Act, Labour has savaged improvement cash for council housing and shifted huge sums into the private sector. And so years after the war, Anthony Crosland has come up with the Final Solution to the Housing Problem - PREFABS!

Why the state provides council housing

First it is important to explain the reasons why the Government started subsidising council housing in 1919.

There were 4 main reasons:

- The threat of working-class action over bad housing conditions and high rents together with the widespread unrest and militancy immediately after the war(details on p.16).
- Failure of private enterprise to provide decent housing at rents people could afford. During the 19th Century housing was provided mainly by private landlords, there was a constant housing shortage and the houses which were built were of a desperately low standard. Victorian do-gooding(usually on the basis of accepting lower profits)and public health legislation failed miserably to alter the effects of the private market.
- Decline of investment in housing which was previously considered safe and profitable. Other investments became more attractive - and they didn't carry similar responsibilities of managing housing. Industrial investment became more profitable after tax changes in 1878 and, particularly after 1904, there was a massive shift of money out of the country as Britain expanded its foreign investments. Housebuilding declined rapidly from 150,000 in 1903 to 45,000 by 1914.
- Pressure from the building industry for large contracts and a steady amount of work.

Temporary measure

The start of the national subsidised council housebuilding programme was initially envisaged only as a temporary measure to reduce the 'temporary' shortage of houses. It was not based on any socialist ideals held by the Liberal/Tory establishment of the time. It was based on political convenience. Once it was started it became increasingly obvious that the intervention of the state was to be permanent. The Tories and the interests they represent now see council housing as a necessity but only for the elderly, disable and people 'in need'. Everyone else must be encouraged and coerced into owner-occupation so creating the maximum possible opportunities for private enterprise and profits - and keeping state intervention to a minimum.

The situation exists where the state satisfies certain housing needs but at the same time creates and expands profitable markets for financiers, land owners, builders, etc. This is partly done by the state undertaking the 'unprofitable' tasks such as slum clearance and rehousing. At the same time it is providing housing without which the militancy of tenants and working-class generally would intensify and hence increasingly threaten the continued existence of the present system.



THE HOUSING MARKET

Big Business and You

In Britain there are over 6 million Council and New Town tenants, and more than 10 million homeowners. Besides that, there are housing associations, trusts (like Peabody), and new schemes like tenant co-ops. There is also private renting, a jungle in itself, with massive legislation and ingenious and pathetic attempts by landlords to avoid it - such as "holiday lets" and licences to occupy.

There is a real shortage of decent houses of the right size, location and cost in all major towns and cities, and in many rural areas.

And housing in Britain is big business. Last year over 300,000 new homes, council and private, were built, mostly by private contractors.

In 1975, Building Societies alone loaned over £5,000m. in mortgages to home buyers.

In the housing market there are two key questions:-

- what real choices in housing are there?
- who controls housing in Britain?

CHOICE

Housing is scarce, to buy or rent. For many people looking for somewhere to live, their problem is not "choice" but rather a complete lack of choice.

The shortage

The shortage shows itself in:

- homelessness - 30,000 homeless families rehoused by councils last year
- overcrowding
- squatting
- ever-rising prices and rents - see diagram

Like the sugar shortage, the housing shortage means queues - the long waiting lists of councils the queues when you answer a flat advertisement.

Income

Because of the shortage, income is a key factor in your ability to choose a decent home. The less you earn, the greater the impact of the shortage

There are immense regional variations in housing, with twice as much council renting in Scotland as home ownership, but high home ownership levels in Wales and South East England. These variations, and the amount of private renting, which is highest in the major cities, also govern the choices available.

But choice is not only limited by income and location. Choices are strongly influenced by attitudes which view housing as a commodity for buying and selling, rather than as a social right. As we describe earlier in this Action Report, the history of housing in the 20th century shows how heavily individual home ownership has been backed by Governments and private enterprise, above housing as a 'social service'. These attitudes encourage people to find their "own" way out, to "stand on their own two feet".

WHO CONTROLS HOUSING?

The housing shortage means that the owners of property (the councils, landlords and developers) and the lenders of money (the banks and Building Societies) are in a position to control who gets a home and how.

House Purchase

Most house purchase is done on credit. The Building Societies attract investors and lend to home buyers. The Societies rank alongside the banks, pension funds and insurance companies in terms of the assets they control. About 90% of home owners get a mortgage from a Building Society - the remainder borrow from local authorities, banks and insurance companies. In 1975, first time house buyers earned an average of £3909 per year, paying about 37% of their income on the mortgage - a high proportion. As well as income, "eligibility" for a mortgage depends on age, sex and job. The Societies



prefer to lend to a man in his late twenties in a white-collar occupation. While the Sex Discrimination Act is meant to abolish their bias towards male borrowers, it doesn't alter the fact that women earn a lot less than men on average. For the Societies, "ability to pay" replaces the council's "priority" system.

Suburban semi

For a mortgage, the type of property also counts. The Building Societies prefer a modern suburban semi-detached. The house, after all, is theirs until the mortgage has been paid off in 25 or 30 years!

We're
creating
a lot of
interest.

Your
National
Wealth
Service




Even the smaller Societies control greater assets, in terms of money and property, than major U.K. companies like I.C.I.

Council Mortgages

Local authorities finance about 7% of all mortgages - but this still involves large sums of money. In 1974 for example they loaned £455m to house buyers. However, in 1975 money for council mortgages was severely cut back by the Government. Councils have to take on the "bad risks" - that is, loans on older properties or to lower income families, because Building Societies, despite some half-hearted pressure from the Government, just will not lend in these cases.

As a last resort, home buyers can borrow from fringe banks and other financial groups, but the interest rates on the loans can be scandalous - see the section on "Working Class Owner Occupation".

A Council Home

Council housing - the major public housing sector - is controlled by Housing Departments the house families according to "need". Each council runs its own "priority" system, with 3 main parts, usually in the following order of priority:-

- rehousing from a clearance area
- homeless families
- waiting list

For general needs

In areas with a large homelessness problem or slum clearance programme, the waiting list really is a waiting list. And it rarely reflects the full housing needs in any area. People do not register for many reasons - the length of the list, the off-putting attitude of councils to single people

or couples without kids, the rule preventing newly-arrived families from registering. Council housing ought to be for general needs and open to all comers.

Housing Associations

Aided by massive Government support, housing associations have grown rapidly from their small charitable origins. Most now run their own waiting lists. Many let 50% or more of their flats to people from the council's own waiting lists, by agreement. Housing associations are not accountable to the public for their management policies. Only a few are democratically controlled by the tenants. (See CA No.17 for more information about Housing Associations)

Rooms to Let

The private landlord is a dying breed. Yet private rented accommodation still plays a crucial part in the housing market. Most people setting up home for the first time on their own will rent from a private landlord. A privately rented flat or house is a "stepping stone" for many people to a council home or one to buy. Last year, 37% of house buyers and upwards of 80% of new council tenants came from a private tenancy. But over 60% of Britain's unfit housing is privately rented. It is the most exploited, overcrowded and often the least secure, in spite of the protections of the Rent Acts. The bad conditions are proof of the unwillingness and inability of councils to enforce the many Public Health and Housing Acts to bring this sector up to a decent standard. Today about 14% of all householders rent from a private landlord, compared with 90% before the First World War. Private renting has shrunk rapidly, yet its importance far-outweighs its size.

WORKING CLASS OWNERS

Not all working class families are tenants. Nor are all owner-occupiers wealthy or on above-average earnings.

So why then are there a lot of working class owner-occupiers?

★ In many working class families attracted to the idea of home ownership, both husband and wife decide to work long hours to be able to buy a house.

£280m

PROFESSIONAL FEES FROM
HOUSE SALES IN 1975

solicitors' fees	£105m p.a.
survey fees	£ 25m p.a.
estate agents' fees	£150m p.a.

★ in certain areas of higher unemployment and declining industry it is still possible to buy relatively cheap houses. Many of these houses are older ones in poor repair and occupied by elderly people.

Because of long waiting lists for a council house and the harsh scarcity of rented accommodation, many working class families are forced to become owner-occupiers. They don't choose to do so, although the propaganda encouraging them to buy is enormous. Here we attempt to describe some of the attractions of home-ownership, both real and not so real. And we describe how, in some city areas, working class home-ownership involves blatant exploitation.

Ownership ... Fact

There are some real advantages to owner-occupation.

- ★ You have control over the house - there are no rules like those laid down by the landlord (council or private) about painting the front door, alterations, or keeping pets.
- ★ You will have more choice over which area to live in - the environment, local schools, shops.
- ★ You can expect to move house more easily, for example if you change jobs.
- ★ You can exercise some choice over the type of home you buy, e.g. terraced, semi-detached, flat.
- ★ There is more likely to be a back yard or garden; this is important, especially for kids.
- ★ Last, but not least, you can make a profit by selling a house and buying a cheaper one, and you can make a gain by buying more space and facilities for the same price.

Clearly, the higher your income, the stronger position you are in to take full advantage of these benefits.

...and fiction

Yet the notion of ownership is partly a myth. The average mortgage lasts 25 or 30 years. Because of the interest paid, in the end the home buyer will have paid for the house itself three times over. Home purchase is "sold" as an "investment" for you and your family. The trade mark of Building Societies includes a castle, a 'symbol of security, history and trust'.

Repairs Burden

One of the facts about owner-occupation not shown in the Building Societies' adverts is the high cost of maintaining and repairing your house once you have bought it. These costs are fully borne by the owner. They can cause real problems for lower income owners, especially in the case of major repair items like a new roof.

Of course it is possible to make real gains from home ownership, because home prices rise steadily every year. It is common practice to take advantage by selling to "trade up" - using the capital gained to acquire "something better" - with a spare bedroom or garden or garage. Yet these gains are only real ones if you move to a cheaper district - e.g. from London to the East Midlands - or if you are "lucky" and find a "bargain".

But for many working class families owner occupation is a very bad deal. The dream of the "ideal home" can turn into a nightmare, with families paying more than they can afford, at high interest rates, for rotten houses.



Who Profits

For some people, however, owner occupation is very profitable - far more so than renting to tenants. Private landlords in a working class area like Saltley, Birmingham, make their profits by selling off previously tenanted houses for owner occupation. This means that:

► the market value of the house jumps three times, giving the landlord a once and for all gain, equivalent to ten year's rent.

► the banks and financiers gain from the higher interest charges on the bigger mortgages given to the new owner occupier.

High Interest

The interest rates paid by house buyers are also higher in areas like Saltley - simply because the Building Societies refuse to loan on older property and to working class families. In Saltley, over half the new owner-occupiers financed their house-purchase not with a Building Society mortgage, but through a bank - mainly Barclays - at an average interest rate of 16%. A smaller number of buyers, 1 in 7, got theirs from a fringe or secondary bank at interest rates of 17-30% (compared with 11% at Building Societies). Cedar Holdings and Julian Hodge (part of Standard and Chartered, whose chairman is Anthony Barber) are the main fringe operators in Saltley. The disadvantages of working class owner-occupation are clear:

- weekly mortgage costs several times the equivalent rent for the accommodation.
- major costs of professional fees.
- repair and maintenance costs in addition.

The same rule applies in buying as in renting - the less you earn, the greater the hardship of obtaining a decent home. How many of the "advantages" of home ownership would melt away if council housing were easily available and better run?

Thanks to Geoff Green. See Birmingham ODP study, "Local Authority Mortgages in Saltley" from: 186 St. Saviour's Road, Saltley, Birmingham 8.

WHY COUNCIL HOUSING IS IMPORTANT

Providing housing over the last 50 years has become a battle between the public and private sectors.

Experience shows over and over again that the private market - even when it has been allowed an almost completely free hand - simply can't provide decent houses for everyone. There's only enough profit in providing housing for richer people.

So council housing is important because it is the only system that can provide housing for everyone.

This is the key issue which divides council housing from private housing. Because it allocates houses on the basis of need, it is possible to meet everyone's housing needs. Because private housing is shared out on the basis of profit, private enterprise will only provide houses while it is profitable to do so.

The profit motive

But council housing will always be hamstrung while it operates alongside the private market. This is the reason for many of its problems and inadequacies.

- ★ Council housing has to compete for land in the highly profitable private market.
- ★ Money for council housing has to be borrowed on the private finance market.
- ★ There is still profit to be made from building council housing.

So although there is no profit made in the rents of council housing, there are still big profits in building and financing it. Consequently, the same problems that affect the private market - shortages, profiteering, speculation - also affect council housing.

Public control

Ultimately the only way to rid council housing of shortages, bad sites and inadequate building materials is to ensure that the land market, the finance market and the big building firms are brought under public control.

But meanwhile it is crucial that as much housing as possible is shared out on the basis of need not profit.

And that means expanding and improving council housing.



COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Places to meet, play and relax

If you live on a council estate built during the last few years, you may be 'lucky' enough to have some community facilities on your estate, such as a community centre, or a play area with equipment the kids want to use, or even a small corner shop or two close to your home. But it's more likely that you have none of these things.

Even if a pub or community centre is planned for your new estate, the chances are that you will have to wait several years and put up a fight to prevent them being axed from the budget.

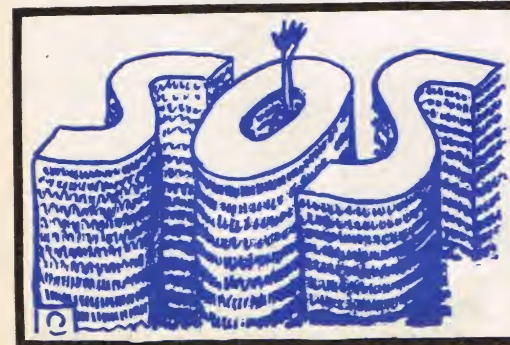
If your estate is an older one, built - as most were - without any community facilities, the council's answer to your campaign for these facilities is no doubt: "There's no money for such luxuries at the moment." In fact, as far as many councils are concerned, there has never been any money for more than the legal minimum and that's not much.

It's always been a struggle

Tenants associations have always had to put pressure on the local council to get community facilities provided. Although some councils in the last few years have developed a more enlightened attitude, too many politicians still play the 'numbers game' with council housing - concentrating on how many houses or flats can be squeezed onto an estate, rather than creating a good environment for tenants to live in.

This section covers:

- ★ the rules and standards governing the kinds of facilities councils can provide; which ones do they have to provide, and who sets the standards?
- ★ who pays for the community facilities and how?
- ★ campaigns for facilities and problems for tenants.



Community facilities must be provided as an essential part of the housing development, not as 'extras' which are automatically cut when money is tight.

What can be provided for tenants?

Local councils have very wide legal powers to provide community facilities for use by council tenants. These powers are given to councils through the Housing Act 1957 (sections 93 and 95), which covers facilities provided 'in connection with the provision of accommodation'. Councils can also use various Education, Planning, Public Health, Recreation and Children Acts in providing for the needs of people living or working in the area. There is nothing in law to stop councils building community facilities meant to be used by a whole neighbourhood, in the middle of a council estate. Even facilities provided specifically under the Housing Act 1957 (S93) don't have to be for the exclusive use of tenants on the estate, and can in fact be some distance away from the estate, as in the case of, say, one tenants' hall serving two estates half a mile apart.

The legal powers allow councils to:

- buy and convert existing buildings for community use.
- build new ones and prepare sites for sports or recreation.
- meet running costs.
- pay staff to work at the community centre, supervised play facilities, and so on.

However, although a council designing a new estate of, say, 500 houses could decide to find the finance to provide a number of community facilities,

there are only two facilities which councils have to provide by law. These are:

- ★ an outside unsupervised play area and fixed equipment. (See DoE Circular 79/72 for detailed space and equipment standards for play areas).
- ★ communal rooms and some facilities for elderly tenants if there is a 'sheltered' housing scheme on the estate. (See DoE Circular 82/69 for size and equipment standards for communal rooms).

Who sets the standards?

The size and 'quality' standards of community facilities are set and changed in a number of ways:

★ By Circulars from the Dept. of the Environment (DoE), Dept. of Education and Science (DES) and other relevant central government departments. These Circulars can give 'guidance' of a general nature on the sort of facilities councils should be providing and the kind of schemes which will and will not be 'favourably considered' for loan sanction. Circulars can also contain very detailed minimum space standards with which councils must comply if they are to get Housing Cost Yardstick (see page 27) approval and hence government subsidy for the two facilities councils have to provide - that is, outside play areas and communal rooms for elderly tenants.

★ By "Design Bulletins" from the DoE which cover different aspects of housing design such as estate layout, facilities, play provision etc in detail, suggesting standards and 'encouraging' attitudes which councils should adopt. (A complete list of these are available from HMSO, 49 High Holborn, London WC1V 6HB).

★ By local councils' own housing, recreation and planning standards. A large council may have a "Housing Development Manual" which the council's architects use as their 'Bible'. It will set out in detail the standards to be adopted for community facilities on all that council's new housing developments. Smaller councils may have some general guidelines such as open space standards, but more detailed standards will be laid down in the design brief for each scheme, drawn up by the architects or housing department.

How are they changed?

Local standards of provision and design, and more general policy issues relating to community facilities can be influenced and changed by pressure from a number of sources.

- It is quite clear that pressure from tenants associations and federations is essential if adequate community facilities are to be provided, and standards not reduced by cuts in public spending.

What are community facilities?

The following are some of the community facilities councils can provide for tenants and their families as part of, or near to, council estates or other council housing development. The list does not include facilities such as major sports and shopping centres or parks serving a whole neighbourhood, even though some public housing developments are as large as small towns and should have these facilities.

In contrast, very small housing schemes built on sites surrounded by older housing, shops, pubs and meeting places will rarely have their own meeting room for example. The tenants living on these small estates will be more concerned about the availability and control of facilities in the surrounding area.

■ Community centres and tenants clubrooms. The difference between these two is usually one of size. Both usually contain a meeting hall, smaller meeting or activity rooms, kitchen and bar, toilets, and a varying amount of sports and recreation equipment.

■ District centres. These are often large buildings or groups of buildings with space for things such as the local council housing office, doctors' and dentists' surgeries and a clinic, as well as a meeting hall and smaller rooms for tenants and community projects to use. Sometimes a library and advice centre are included, particularly if the centre is on a shopping street.

■ Communal rooms, kitchens and sitting-out areas for elderly tenants

■ Buildings for a youth club

■ Play areas and equipment for children of all ages. These range from sand pits and slides for toddlers, through to separate ball games areas and Adventure Playgrounds with a hut for older children

■ Rooms, equipment and staff for pre-school play groups, day nurseries and holiday play schemes

■ Hobby rooms and workshops

■ Laundry rooms, machines and drying areas

■ Pubs and churches

■ Shops, and corner shops with accommodation

above

■ Schools and sports grounds

■ Gardens and open space

■ Buildings for commercial uses. Councils can even provide buildings for light industry on estates (they can't run these themselves!).

■ Buildings and other facilities for meals and refreshments.

- The housing manager may find that a number of tenants associations are pressing for a tenants meeting hall, and may recommend a general policy change to the council.
- A local councillor may press for better facilities for an estate in his or her own ward, and other tenants associations may demand the same treatment.
- Council architects or planners can decide to search for ways in which the Yardstick (see page 27) can be used on a particular scheme to help pay for, say, a better equipped play area or a proper play hut. They would do this usually only on instructions from the housing department or the Housing Committee.

More info...

► The White Paper: "Sport and Recreation" and DES Circular 2/70: "The Chance to Share" stress the importance of local authorities making the maximum use of, for example, school buildings for a wider community. Given the huge cuts in public expenditure and the effect they will have on councils' education, social service and other building programmes, it appears that the only way tenant pressure is going to achieve facilities such as youth clubs and sports equipment is through the "dual use" of new and existing buildings and land provided for some other purpose, such as a school and its playgrounds. Schools built on or near estates could be used by tenants for both daytime and evening community activities throughout the year, given sensible management, and better design of new buildings. The other advantage of this approach is that new estates could be provided with facilities much quicker than at present, because school buildings have to be provided early on in the development.

► For a list of organisations giving advice and providing money, staff, equipment for play schemes of all sorts see CA no 19 p 20. You could also contact the Children and Youth Action Group, Victoria Chambers, 16-20 Strutton Ground, London SW1 01-222 0261.



Using an old building

In the middle of the Meadows redevelopment area in Nottingham is a very large ex-British Rail office building which was due for demolition along with the old houses. With only a few weeks to go before demolition, the Meadows Association of Tenants and Residents (MATAR) started and won a campaign to get the building saved for conversion into a community centre for use by local tenants and community organisations.

The Council, once convinced that they should save the building, decided that they wanted to have complete control over the conversion and management of it. This was in spite of the fact that MATAR had already had discussions with a local brewery about getting a loan to develop and run the community centre themselves, in return for a concession to the brewery to supply beer to a social club in the building.

The Council's own conversion plans were very expensive (£120,000) and so they applied for an Urban Aid grant of £80,000. There was a delay of 8 months before the application was rejected. A public meeting of the community, play and other interest groups in the Meadows demonstrated the community's support for the idea of running a centre. However, the Council approached the various Meadows groups directly, asking which rooms in the centre each organisation wanted. This was in direct conflict with the principle of community control which the groups had agreed, so they drew up their own policy statement on how the building should be run and who should have which rooms.

The Council has now helped to delay the opening up of the building by almost two years and have only just approved money and plans for opening up the ground floor (this temporarily gets over the problem of inadequate fire precautions in the whole building). In the meantime, the building has been vandalised and it has been very difficult to sustain enthusiasm in the area for organising the centre over such a long period. MATAR, 63 Wilford Road, The Meadows, Nottingham.



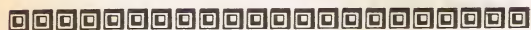
DON'T PLAY HERE!

Until the Charecroft Estate Tenants Association started to campaign two years ago for play equipment and a proper play area for their tower block estate, Hammersmith Council were quite happy to call the estate's 'amenity deck' a play area of the sort that they have to provide by law. This 'amenity deck' is two storeys up, windy, with seats and shrubs in pots, and is forbidden territory for kids wanting to play ball games.

Two years ago the tenants got permission to use the 'amenity deck' for a summer play project lasting a number of weeks and received an Urban Aid grant to buy equipment and employ staff to run the project. The following year the summer project was run again on the 'amenity deck'. However, there was no indoor play space for the kids and it took another struggle and a promise that it wouldn't cost the council a penny, just to get permission to convert an unused pram store.

It wasn't until a few months ago that the Council finally agreed to set wheels in motion to provide and pay for fixed and permanent play equipment - slides, swings, see-saws, etc. - to turn part of this amenity deck into the play area which should have been there from the beginning.

Thanks to John Teale - Secretary of Charecroft Tenants Association.



WHERE THE MONEY COMES FROM

Money for buildings, land and equipment for community facilities on council estates comes from a number of sources, as does the money needed to staff and run the facilities. The main sources of money are listed below:



The Housing Cost Yardstick

This is one of the means by which central government controls the level of expenditure on new council housing, by refusing to subsidise schemes in which the building costs per dwelling exceed a given level. This level is laid down in government Circulars, and is increased from time to time.

This given level, or 'Yardstick', varies according to the size of the new houses or flats and the density of the development. Additions to the Yardstick are made for a number of factors including the number of old persons and children to be housed in the scheme. This is how money is found for communal old people's sitting rooms and outdoor play areas for children. In fact, the Housing Cost Yardstick allowance is related to the design and space standards of the dwellings themselves, leaving a very small amount for other community facilities and landscaping. These extras can only be funded under the Yardstick and subsidy arrangements by cutting corners on, for example, special design features of the scheme whilst claiming the maximum Yardstick.

An extra 10% above Yardstick can be spent on an estate, although it doesn't attract a government subsidy, and this is usually used for things like district heating schemes. If prospective tenants or a tenants federation were involved at the design stage of a new housing scheme, they would be able to press the council to use this 'extra' for community facilities.

Borrowing money on the open market

Most of the money for council building and land has to be borrowed on the open market (see p15 and CA no.18,p16). and can only be borrowed with permission ("Loan Sanction") from the government. For this purpose, capital spending is divided into two parts:

★ Key Sector - covering schools, hospitals, house-building costs not covered by subsidy, and other major council developments. These schemes are given priority by the government and councils will usually get loan sanction for them.

★ **Locally Determined Sector** - represents the relatively small sum of money which councils can borrow each year to spend as they choose without getting specific permission from the government for each scheme. LDS is usually spent on "non priority" items like parks and sports and community facilities. At a time of cuts in public expenditure and pressure to keep the rates down, the first cuts are made in money needed to build, pay off interest charges and running costs on "non essential" community facilities.

Dodging the cash limits

Councils such as Haringey in London, who are determined to keep up a programme of building community centres and converting old buildings for community use, have found a way round the problems involved in using LDS money. They apply to the DoE for loan sanction under the **Key Sector** part of council spending instead. Using section 93 of the 1957 Housing Act, they argue that the community centre is an integral part of the housing development, will benefit a large number of tenants, (if the estate is a small one but close to another estate, the centre can be built for both estates), and that it falls within the DoE's own cost limits for this kind of building. In this way centres costing £100,000 and more are being approved and built in Haringey, mostly on older estates. So far there are no limits from the DoE on the total amount of money that can be borrowed by councils in this way.



Urban Aid

This source of money provides a cheap way for councils to provide community centres, Adventure Playgrounds, youth clubs. etc. because they can apply to the Home Office for an Urban Aid grant of 75% of the cost of building and/or running any facility which they don't, by law, have to provide anyway. As council's own money gets tighter, it is probable that councils will take a greater share of the Urban Aid funds for their own schemes, leaving less for community groups schemes. However, there is no reason why councils' Urban Aid-funded community facilities should not be handed over to a tenants association to manage.

Deals with developers

Shops at subsidised rents, sports and recreation facilities are often provided for the council as part of a planning 'deal' with a private developer

in which, in return for these facilities, the developer gets planning permission for offices or luxury housing. However, the 'public open space' or 'play area' on the developer's plans can turn out to be a windswept and unusable amenity deck, and the 'sports facilities' may be too expensive for local tenants to use.

Footnote

Money for community facilities is allocated by a number of different council committees: Recreation Education, Housing, Social Services, Community Development, and so on. While different councils have a different committee set-up, the majority no doubt add to the problem of delays in providing new facilities on estates by the lack of any coordinated community facilities 'plan' alongside the physical plans for new housing. The fact that each committee has to get approval from a separate government department for its building schemes also adds to these delays.

Some Tips...

★ There's the obvious danger that raising money for, and running a community centre or Adventure Playground will take up all your tenants association's time and energy. Community control over community facilities is important, for example who should use the centre, but it shouldn't mean that you have to sacrifice all other tenant action and become a social club.

★ Just because you have pressed for a community facility that doesn't mean you have to pay the running and staff costs yourselves. Make sure that the council has budgetted realistically for running costs for your community centre etc. - to leave you free to build up a variety of activities, not just money-raising ones. Some facilities, like Day Nurseries, should be run by the council themselves.

★ Tenants Federations can play an important part in campaigning for better standards of provision for all estates in the area, including those which are not yet built and where there obviously won't be a tenants association until the estate is occupied. Tenant action at the planning stage is essential if delays in building community facilities are to be prevented. Arrange a meeting with the council to find out what facilities are to be provided and where.

★ If redevelopment of an area is carried out in small phases so that people can move into the new houses in the same neighbourhood as their old home, (i.e. 'Community Based Renewal'), then the tenants or residents association from the old area can campaign for the facilities they will need when the new house are ready. They can also press for suitable buildings in the redevelopment area to be saved and converted for community use by tenants in the new housing.

GREEN BANS

An interview with Jack Munday

Australian building worker Jack Munday played a leading part in starting the "Green Bans" in that country. This involved the blacking by building workers of certain sites and developments considered by the local residents groups and the workers to be socially, financially and environmentally wrong. Community Action interviewed him when he was in England earlier this year.

C.A. How did the situation develop to the point where your union could organise militant action over development and environmental issues?

J.M. About 15 years ago Japanese and American capital started flowing into Australia, and a very reactionary Tory government encouraged this. They lifted the height limit for buildings: it used to be 150 feet, now there's no limit. The public generally thought, "well, this is good; big buildings show that we've arrived," a mini New York. It was only in the late 'sixties that a re-thinking took place, particularly when residents were being turfed out of the inner city areas. In the particular union that I was in, we had a bitter struggle to win the leadership of the union - it was controlled by thugs and semi-criminal elements who openly worked in collusion with the employers.

With our previous involvement in campaigns for women's rights to work in the industry on all types of job, work-stoppages organised against the Vietnam War, support for blacks and opposition to the 1971 South African Springbok Tour, we were ready to take on property development issues. However, if we had not also had the confidence of our members about the basic economic issues, we would not have succeeded in this new campaign. We won a lot of confidence in our leadership by our fight to civilise the building industry, to try to give more continuity of work, and to impose the safety standards.

Green bans

C.A. How did the Green Bans begin?

J.M. The green bans commenced in 1971. We carried resolutions, expressing concern at the destruction of Sydney, at the overbuilding of office space and the failure to build essential hospitals and schools, creches and kindergartens and homes, and saying that the government should intervene and divert material and human and financial resources to build things which are socially beneficial.

A group of women in Kelly's Bush, a very upper class area of Sydney, came to us because a big Melbourne-based developer had obtained rights to destroy the last bushland and put up luxurious homes. They had lobbied members of state parliament, and all the normal means of protest. And as a last resort they came to us, and said that they had read in the paper that we were expressing concern for environmental issues, and more or less said, here's a chance to put your feeling into practice. Well, the attitude of the builders' labourers' Executive was interesting to reflect upon: they were all 'left-wing' of various hues and political postures - and they said, why should we fight for those middle-class shits, why should we say yes? There aren't any builders' labourers living in the area. And others of us argued that, well, we've got to be consistent, if the Bush goes for building it will go to a very fortunate few people, but if it's kept, it's there for builders' labourers and their families and other low income groups.

Public meeting

So we won the day, and we then went to them and said: provided that a public meeting is held and there's a real demonstration by the people in the area that they want to stop the development, we're prepared to accede to their request and put a ban on it. So a huge meeting was held and we imposed a ban. What really set things alight was the developer, Jennings, then said he would use piece-work labour or non-union labour to do it. And we replied by calling a meeting on one of Jennings' biggest jobs in Sydney, a multi-storey office block. The workers carried a resolution unanimously that if one blade of grass or one tree was touched on Kelly's Bush that half-completed building would remain half-completed forever as a monument to Jennings. That building was worth many millions to him. So even carving bushland up was worth nothing as much as that.

Anarchy gone mad!

Now the state governor at the time was a Tory - misnamed Liberal in Australia. He, and Ministers, had really become millionaires through deals. He just went off his brain. "Anarchy gone mad. Mere builders' labourers setting themselves up as proletarian town planners", y'know. And we replied

by saying, well we're not doing that, we're only giving the people a greater right...or a further say - a breathing space whilst they can express their democratic right as to why they think the bushland should remain. And then we went on to say that, even if we are setting ourselves up as town planners, maybe we're doing a better job than the officials were. But I think it's important to remember that it was the women coming to us, and we at least responded. I think most unions wouldn't have responded; they would have said: oh, we can't do it, or carried a paper resolution "that we deplore this," blah, blah. Then we were inundated with requests to impose similar bans. At that time we hit upon the idea of calling them "green bans," because "black bans" have got connotations of a union using its muscle to get money or conditions for its own members, often not being concerned with other parts of the labour movement; whereas our action was for the people as a whole. Eventually there were forty-two bans, three thousand million dollars' worth of development held up. And the papers were screaming: get rid of the leadership, they're using you like puppets; their job is to get better wages and conditions, etc., not to become involved in other areas of work. We then took up with our members very strongly at meetings about the two-sided nature of the fight... the fight to keep parkland, and to keep buildings for people, and then to force governments to redirect their finances; if, for example, we could stop multi-storey office building and refuse to build them, well those same capitalists would have to reinvest their money either in other industries or in other areas of the building industry that were less profitable, like housing - at least that is more socially beneficial. And in fact this did happen. In part it happened. And those workers, even though the unemployment was not at the level that it is here - that allowed us more scope, possibly - who refused to work on multi-storey buildings lost a lot of money because the property developers were making so much money that they could throw a few crumbs in the way of increased wages to the workers.

Government hatred

When all the bans were on, the hatred amongst the government of the day and the developers really intensified, and there was talk of bringing in new laws against the union - in fact they did bring one in: summary offences, which meant that anyone who occupied a building could be jailed. At that stage the residents were linking up with the unionists and occupying buildings.

Then there was the Rocks - it's right on the harbour and it's always been a working-class area, mainly dockers and seamen and people who work on the harbour, ferry-people and people who service the city. And they were going to knock it down - they realised what a beautiful bit of real estate it was - and extend the concrete jungle right down to the harbour. The residents came to us, and a

ban was imposed. Not only that, they drew up their own plan - a people's plan - so you had the government's plan, and then you had the people's plan, drawn up in conjunction with architects and sociologists and planners, engineers who were sympathetic to the cause. And so this was good, instead of just having the green ban as a negative, stopping, defensive tactic, we said, no, we want to build, but we want to build buildings that are socially beneficial to the community. And this then forced the government to change, to scrap their plan and incorporate most of the ideas of the residents' plan. And those parts that have been accepted by the residents we've gone ahead and allowed to be built. So this was good for us too because when the heat was coming on us and we were being accused that we were stopping our members from working, this allowed us to do something about it. We have an extremely bad government now, almost Fascist, believe me. One of their election planks was that they were going to stop unions going beyond the wages and conditions issues.



Scab labour

There were real achievements which came over the course of 4 years of really bitter fights. They tried to use scab labour, for example. In one instance they had a site completely surrounded by the police as the scabs knocked the building down. But before that happened, when the scabs first started knocking the building down, we stopped all of Sydney and marched to the site. The scabs fled in all directions. We had hundreds of workers occupying the building and that received terrific publicity. That was on a Friday and on the Monday the police came back to try and get a confrontation. The police surrounded the site and protected the scabs while they worked.

The workers were irate and wanted to march down to the site. However, it would have been a bloody brawl and it would have lost us a lot of public

support that had been building up in this period. Instead we had a mass stoppage - building workers, seamen, waterside workers, etc. Anyway, once they'd pulled the building down it would remain a park because we wouldn't allow anything to be built on it. They couldn't afford to have hundreds of police standing around the site for months while building work went on. So it remained a park in the Rocks. Some orthodox and traditional trade union leaders, were as scathing in their remarks as the captains of industry and the newspapers and the government. So a whole range of debates went on, and it's hard to believe that a union that was a relatively small union - but certainly in a very decisive position in that no buildings could be demolished without us and no excavation could commence without us...We had other building unions who were screaming; they were saying that we were denying them work, that we were bringing the union movement into disrepute. On the contrary, it was doing exactly the opposite.

Rank & file involvement

This has made me think of the new potential of unionism. Most union rank and file have a position where they're held back by a union bureaucracy. Particularly by the right and sometimes even the left. We had more involvement with the rank and file and workers felt as though they were part of the union, and not just going along and formally sitting down to a little meeting and casting a vote and leaving it to the executive to carry it through. And these sorts of things made the union a hell of a lot different and gave a lot of confidence to the action groups.

C.A. And are there green bans in other cities in Australia?

J.M. Yes, about fourteen unions in other parts of the country have given support to community action and imposed green bans in connection with other issues. For example, the Queensland Labour Council, representing all the Queensland unions, put a ban on a sand-mining venture which would have destroyed for ever an island of great beauty.

This was in spite of a government vote in favour of the mining, the legal right of the company to mine there, and unemployment in the area. In Victoria, a power station development was held up for a year and a half by a ban because of the danger of pollution to nearby Melbourne. Finally the State Premier went to the unions and asked where they would allow it to be built!

Joint action

C.A. Did you form joint committees with the action groups involved in the occupations and green bans?

J.M. The thing that allowed us again to live as long as we did was the fact that even though our opponents were saying that we were making the decisions, we always claimed - and rigidly stuck to

this - that we were responding to a legitimate and sizeable grouping of people coming together on the urban issue, and then we withheld our labour so as to allow those people to express their concern. Once we did that we had discussions with them, but we kept our own entity, we didn't merge as a coalition. We certainly fought together, but the residents' action groups could make their decisions - for example, if they made a decision to lift the ban, well then it's lifted, even if we thought it was wrong.

Other unions?

One thing that happened was that the community group that had asked for the ban had a greater feeling of its own strength. It had called on the union movement, and in so doing, I think it created a better understanding of what it could do. I also think through having workers involved - workers had a wider effect - it was more than just wages and conditions - they could see that if you're fighting to save homes from a proposed motorway it was another worker like yourself whose home was going to be knocked down.



C.A. What effect did the action between the building workers and residents have on workers in other industries?

J.M. I don't think it made the sort of spectacular impact that the builders' labourers did. There wasn't the sensational development like that in other industries but other workers then started to be more conscious of wider issues and in fact fourteen unions, mainly engineering, have been involved in a number of these actions, but mainly of a supportive nature. Then again, they wouldn't have such direct involvement in the kinds of issues which action groups were concerned with at that time.

On things like whether industry should be coming into an area, they could, and they have been active - but not to a marked degree. I think to put it in its real perspective there's an awareness there. But the thing that I believe is the most important aspect about the whole struggle was that the green ban movement was raising for the first time the social consequence of labour, what we should do with labour, how labour should be used.

LOBBYING

The tactic of lobbying simply means getting some time for your group to talk with your local councillor or MP to try to bring them round to your point of view and support your campaign.

Lobbying is part and parcel of the formal political process. It means using your right of access to your formally-elected Councillors or Members of Parliament. But it is just one of the tactics to use in a campaign. It is unlikely to win your case on its own, and will not be effective without careful preparation and thorough follow-up.

This article describes what lobbying is, when to use it, how to go about it.

WHAT IS LOBBYING ?

*Lobbying is a face to face dialogue, as opposed to the impersonal approach such as letters.

*Lobbying is a political act. You are attempting to discover where a politician or official stands in connection with your demands and how far he will support you.

*Lobbying is often carried out on the politician's or officer's home ground, such as at a surgery, in the town hall, at the House of Commons. He or she thus has a lot of advantages, e.g. setting a time limit, determining who will be present.

WHEN TO LOBBY

Lobbying is used when it seems realistic to think that a decision-maker could be influenced to give support to your case on an issue of local or national government policy-making. It can be used:

*to influence a decision which is about to be made by a Council or by Parliament.

*to gain the initial support of policy-makers where it is important to influence a decision which could be made in the future.

*to force consultation on an issue by establishing a dialogue, making a show of strength and emphasising the concern which you have.

*to force a decision-maker who has been sitting on the fence to show where he stands - for or against.

ADVICE
SURGERY
EVERY MONTH
FOR ONE HOUR
MEET YOUR LOCAL
COUNCILLOR
AND DISCUSS ALL YOUR
PROBLEMS
no Hawkers
Circulars
Lobbies

Advantages

The advantage of lobbying is that it gives you a chance to sit down and talk through an issue in some detail with your Councillor or MP with greater flexibility than letters or a report can give, while a personal representation is more effective in showing the strength and urgency of feeling behind your demands.

Disadvantages

The disadvantage of lobbying is that it is usually done in a quiet place by delegates from the group. There is a danger of being drawn into the "confidence" of the politician. You could find yourself in a position where only an elite few in your group know what is going on. You may be asked to play it the way of the politician and have the wind taken out of your campaign only to be let down later and so lose all credibility.

CONTACT MAKING

The first step is to find out where the decision is to be made and who has the power to influence it. Obviously there is likely to be little point in lobbying a District Councillor if the decision is to be made by the County or by Parliament. A few tips:

*Find out which councillors sit on the committees dealing with your problem. The chairman of the committee is the most powerful member and in some cases may have power to make the decision himself. This information is available from the town hall.

TOWN HALL HOUSE OF COMMONS

* MPs can put pressure on the government or on a government department. They can also put pressure on the Council by supporting your case.

* Council officers and civil servants often exert strong influence over the politicians. Although not formally making the decisions themselves, their recommendations are often crucial.

* Contacts inside the local and national press might be useful.

* Councillors or MPs may have interests useful to your case, both inside the Houses of Parliament as members of a 'group' of MPs, and of course their outside interests. You may turn up unknown interests, bargaining points and informal contacts. A thorough knowledge of your adversary or supporter is a good tactic and can be useful. Ask around other groups, follow the local and national press, use contacts in the local political parties (see CA Nos. 15 and 16



.....the demonstration may be as important as the lobby itself.....

on how local power network works, and Investigators' Handbook).

LOBBYING AS A TACTIC

Once you've decided who you're going to lobby, you need to plan your campaign:

* The lobby is only part of your campaign, and you must decide how it fits in with other tactics: letters, reports, demonstrations, petitions, etc.

* Prepare your case beforehand. A lobby is only credible when it has a particular point to it. You want to create a dialogue on equal terms. The case you want to present must therefore be carefully prepared. Get together your evidence: letters, reports, etc., and sort out your arguments. Don't be fobbed off with vague answers: you know you have a case.

* Many lobbies include delivering a petition, especially Parliamentary lobbies (see CA No. 20, Preparing a Petition. Parliamentary petitions require a specific wording which is explained in books on Parliamentary procedure to be found in most reference libraries).

* Contact local and/or national press, radio and television to try to ensure your lobby gets publicity. Lobbying itself may not be considered a very newsworthy item, so the demonstration that supports a lobby may be as important as the lobby itself.

METHODS Councillors

* Councillors can be lobbied at their surgeries, their homes, at meetings and at the town hall. It is possible to lobby Council committees, although they will generally see groups or representatives only over major issues. If you ask a Councillor for permission to send a delegation to a meeting, that Committee may then formally invite you to attend and present your case. You will also be able to present a petition. But you will only be allowed to

answer questions put to you by the Councillors. And remember that very often the decision has already been taken before the Committee meeting by the party group of the majority party.

M.P.'s

* MPs can be lobbied locally at their surgeries. This is obviously less formal than lobbying at the House of Commons, but because of the limited time usually available careful preparation is just as necessary.

* Parliamentary lobbying is a formal process taking place in the central lobby of the Houses of Parliament. To call your MP you must enter the name on a 'green card'. A doorkeeper then contacts the MP who will meet you in the lobby. There is not much time available, so again preparation is essential. Obviously, make sure your MP is going to be in the House. Lobbying can be carried out from 2 pm Monday to Friday. Tuesdays and Thursdays, when there is "Prime Minister's question time", are the best days to catch your MP.

FOLLOW IT UP!

* Follow up is essential. Make a note of all the key points of the meeting. It can be very useful, especially if you have been given verbal promises, to follow the lobby with a letter to the person you have seen, detailing what you understand to have been said and promised.

* It is important that the delegates report back in full through newsletters, meetings and so on. Don't allow the politicians to split your group.

* Don't expect your lobby to win your case by itself, and be sceptical of promises made until they are fulfilled. The lobby needs to be followed up by further action and pressure until your case is won.

Remember it's only a tactic: you get some idea of its limitations when you realise we've been electing working class councillors and MP's for nearly a century now.

Claimants



Organise

WE OUGHT TO GET TOGETHER!

SETTING UP A CLAIMANTS UNION

Things are changing at your local social security office. Yours may not yet have wall-to-wall carpeting and canned music but subtle changes have been taking place since the old National Assistance Board days. The endless queues and hard benches have been replaced by the appointment system, home visits and postal review schemes, cash over the counter has been replaced by the automatic computer Giro, the public 'confessions of poverty' in the waiting room have been replaced by semi-private interview cubicles and we are now called 'claimants' rather than 'applicants'. This new, streamlined approach by the DHSS has made it easier for them to contain claimants' anger by separating them from each other, to pay more attention to what they call their 'problem cases' and to prevent any confrontation at the point of contact in the local office.

But for the individual claimant these 'improvements' have not made it easier to break through to claim what is not only his or her right but also the only source of income that the claimant has. Community Action supports the setting up of claimants unions because we've learnt that our strength comes through united action whether it be in tenants groups, trade unions or claimants unions. Claimants organized together in unions pose a far greater threat to the 'welfare system', the underpinning of our entire economic system, as they attempt to give back to people the confidence to act on their own behalf and to support others, which the Social Security 'welfare system' takes away.

This article attempts to show:

- how to set up a claimants union
- some of the problems unions have come up against in getting organized and how they've tried to overcome them.

How to start

★ Most unions start with at least 2 people willing to do the work of making contact with other claimants, organizing the first meeting and starting to help others with their claims. If you are keen and persistent you could start

it singlehanded, although it will probably take a long time to build up. You will need access to a typewriter and a duplicating machine at the outset for leaflets and have somewhere to hold the first meeting. Some areas have a community centre and some have a neighbourhood advice centre where there will be facilities and rooms available. If you don't have a local community centre, then try church halls, youth clubs, libraries, etc. You may need a small amount of money to start off with to buy paper for advertising the first meeting. Produce a short leaflet advertising date, time and place of the first meeting and distribute it at the employment exchange, social security office and to any local groups in your area which may already involve claimants, e.g. tenants associations, womens groups, etc. However, there is probably no better advert than 'word of mouth'.



★ Advice and support on setting up a union is freely available from your nearest Regional Co-ordinating union. They produce leaflets, C.U. publications which unions get at a large discount and someone will probably be willing to give a talk at your first meeting. For the address of your nearest regional union, see CA no.22,p.35, or the Claimants Newspaper, available from Claimants Publications Library, 19 Carlyle Road, Birmingham 16.

★ The focal point of nearly all unions is the regular weekly meeting open to all claimants. The meeting usually covers individual claims and appeals, political issues and 'Regional' and 'National Federation of Claimants Unions' business. All claimants have by necessity a lot of personal experience of claiming individually and the purpose of the first few meetings will be to pool this experience in an attempt to support and advise each other to sort out common problems. A supply of claim, appeal and complaint forms can be obtained from the NFCU which often have a 'magical' effect on the DHSS.

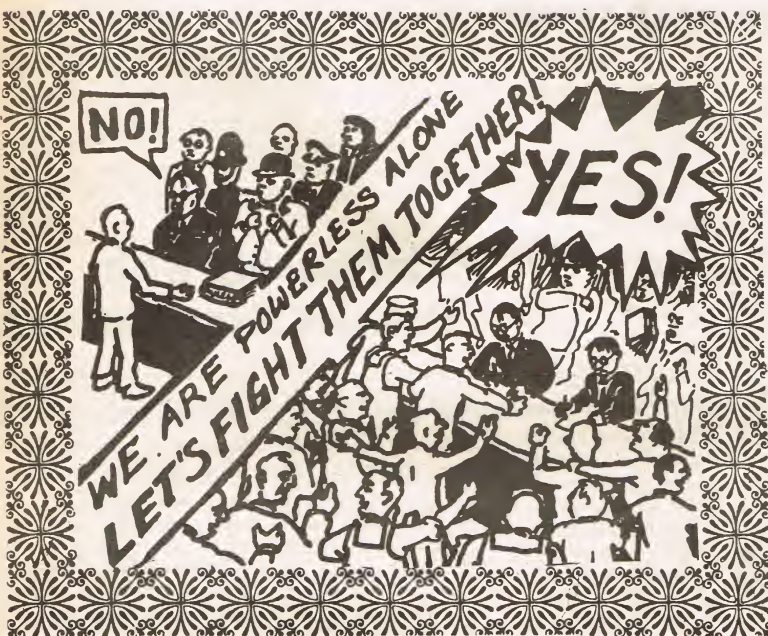
★ There can be no blue-print for setting up a strong claimants union but the essence is one of

rank and file control and there are therefore certain minimum standards. Claimants unions believe in total control of the union by all its members: no 'experts', no leaders, no 'casework' by specialists, no indispensable activists. In striving for these things, unions face a variety of problems.

The Meeting Place

The majority of groups are either home based or use a local neighbourhood centre as their base. Unions that operate from someone's home have nearly always found that it has led to an over-concentration of union activity in one place.

Claimants have tended to see the house as an 'advice bureau' and call round whenever they need urgent individual assistance, thus making the people who live in the house the people who 'run' the union. This could also cause practical problems, e.g. running up large telephone bills. Unions that operate from a neighbourhood centre have the advantages of a neutral base that all



claimants can use, a common phone number and mailing address plus somewhere to store information, put up posters and meet new claimants. However, as most centres give over-the-counter advice to individual claimants, many claimants won't see any need to join a union and go to weekly meetings. Many unions have resolved this problem by asking the centre to refer all claimants to the weekly meeting and only to advise in cases of real urgency, at the same time emphasising that the union is the only effective means of dealing with the S.S.

Commitment

No group can keep going without enthusiasm. Just because a claimant comes to a weekly meeting, it doesn't mean to say that he or she will keep coming when his/her own claim has been sorted out. Some unions find this disheartening and have become resigned to it. Other unions see it as inevitable but try to combat it by stressing the need to put something into the union in order to get anything out and by concentrating recruitment on long-term claimants. There are various ways in which unions can encourage enthusiasm and commitment, such as:

- making sure that the union becomes involved in local campaigns, e.g. against cuts, unemployment etc.
- joining in with the campaigns of the National Federation of Claimants Unions, e.g. the current Fight to Live campaign which joined trade unions in the November 27 unemployment lobby.
- by having social activities as part of a meeting, e.g. Brent C.U. operates a small food co-op once a fortnight. The

food is bought cheaply and sold to union members at the end of the meeting. Any excess goes to a pensioners group; also, by ensuring that all members commit themselves at least to regular financial support. Many C.U.s charge a 25p membership fee and then collect a 5p sub every week from members. This enables unions to bulk-buy leaflets, pamphlets, etc. and the issuing of membership cards helps to form a group identity.



Knowledge is power!

In any group, be it a tenants group, a union branch or a claimants union there is the tendency for the more experienced and 'knowledgeable' members to monopolize meetings. In Claimants unions there is also a problem when one claimant is obsessed with talking about his or her own claim. Unions must be constantly aware of these dangers from the outset and a chairperson is usually necessary to make sure that everyone has

an equal chance of discussing individual claims and the business of the union. Every claim should be discussed by everyone at the meeting and tactics for dealing with them should be decided together. Some unions use part of the meeting for discussing the writing of information leaflets and others will organize a rota-system whereby each member swots up on a particular aspect of DHSS policy or law and then passes the knowledge on to other members at the weekly meeting. All unions have copies or access to these pamphlets and books which are essential tools for the fight with the DHSS.

The Supplementary Benefits Handbook. Price 50p from HMSO.

Penguin Guide to Supplementary Benefits by Tony Lynes. Price 45p.

Supplementary Benefit Act, 1966 and 1971, available from HMSO.

Claimants Union pamphlets and Newspaper which are available at reduced prices for claimants unions from Claimants Library, 19 Carlyle Road, Birmingham 16.

Relationship with trade unions



Although Claimants unions are non-party political, they can't exist in a political vacuum. Claimants must realise that their exploitation by the 'welfare system' is part and parcel of a wider exploitation of the working class as workers, tenants, women, blacks and claimants. Winning a few pence more for claimants, although of great value to the individual claimant, is not a great victory in itself. As South Shields C.U. writes: "The members are working-class people whose only difference from Trade Union members is that they are not at present working (many also are or have been Trade Unionists); therefore the Claimants Union is an integral part of the rank and file labour movement." This is not just high-flown talk either because an important development in the South-East Claimants movement has been the setting up of a Joint Strike Claims Committee within the Trades Council composed of trade unionists and claimants union members. Whenever a union is involved in a work dispute, the Committee offers its 'expertise' and support to the

dispute. During the 1972 Miners Strike, miners in the South East were getting twice as much money per head for strikers families than anywhere else in the country. This was the direct result of the activities on the Trades Council of C.U. members. Since then a number of trade union branches have themselves affiliated to the local claimants union.

In Coventry, plant claimants committees have been set up to advise and support unemployed car workers and those threatened with short-time working and redundancy at Chryslers.



Not all claimants unions see the forging of links with the labour movement as desirable; some consider trade unions to be male-dominated bureaucracies and trade unionists to be 'those people who sit on the opposite side of the bench at appeal tribunals'. This is a problem which each claimants union will have to resolve locally for themselves.

Relationship with Tenants Associations

Although not all C.U. members may consider themselves 'workers' in the same way as South Shields C.U. does, almost all C.U. members are also tenants and may already belong to tenants associations. There is a great scope for these groups

to work together and support and advise each other. Tenants associations frequently come into contact with the means-tested 'welfare system' in the form of rent and rate rebate schemes. Many tenants, although in full-time work may be claiming such benefits as Family Income Supplement. In these areas the distinction between 'claimant' and 'tenant' starts to blur and tenants associations may wish to start their own claimants union from amongst their own members.

As claimants, workers and tenants we are all fighting the same fight. Trade Unions fight for better wages and conditions. Tenants groups fight for better housing conditions in their street. Tenants groups and trade unions should join in a united front with claimants unions who are struggling for an adequate income for all working-class people.

INFORMATION EXCHANGE

HOUSING ACTION AREA: THE MARSH AREA ACTION GROUP

The Marsh Area in Workington has suffered planning blight for 10 years and the report THE FUTURE OF THE MARSH puts the residents' case against clearance and in favour of establishing the area as a Housing Action Area. The Group would like to hear from others who have experience of fighting development plans. Free, but please send an A4 SAE(11p) or your own report in exchange to, Marsh Area Action Group, Chairman Joe Cold, 35 South Marsh Street, Workington, Cumbria.

HOUSING ACTION AT SEVEN DIALS

Detailed report from the Covent Garden Community Association proposing that the area be declared a Housing Action Area. History and causes of the area's slow decay; need for a systematic approach to the problem; analysis of available policies and arguments in favour of the HAA method. 25p + 11p postage from CGCA, 1 Shelton Street, London WC2H 9JN

G.I.A.s - LEFT TO ROT

This is the report by the Benwell Grove Residents Association Development Group on work done in an 11-month period to get Compulsory Improvement Notices served on a block of houses in a General Improvement Area. Basically a simple chronological account of their experience, with depressing conclusions on the outlook for G.I.A.'s. s.a.e. to BGRADG, 45 Benwell Grove, Newcastle upon Tyne 4.

Dear Community Action,

Your article on "Better Bus Services" (issue 23) made interesting reading. May I offer one fact and one observation?

Fact. The London Transport Passengers Committee is not, in the normal sense, "a committee of the GLC". It is established under the Transport (London) Act 1969 as an independent consultative body, analogous to those appended to other nationalised industries. It is true that the GLC is formally responsible for appointing its members, but members of the GLC are specifically excluded. Any organisation with an interest in London Transport's services, from the passengers' point of view, may make a nomination and various community groups are represented on the Committee at present.

Observation. "Excuses like staff shortages or rising costs" may nonetheless be true. The vast majority of ordinary bus services in Britain are provided by either nationalised companies or by

HOUSING ACTION AREAS: NORTH ISLINGTON HOUSING

RIGHTS PROJECT

A useful report produced for the council, arguing for a more effective overall housing programme. It discusses Housing Action Areas in context, and outlines a comprehensive plan of action.

Send a s.a.e. to NIHRP 386, Hornsey Rd. London N19

REPORTS & THINGS

CAMERAWORK. £3.50 p.a. from Half Moon

Photography Workshop, 27 Alie Street, London E1

A new bimonthly from HMFW, designed to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas, views and information on photography and other forms of communication, to demystify the process of photography. First issue includes an article on the politics of photography.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS - COMMUNITY WORK

OR CLASS POLITICS. 10p + s.a.e. from P.E.C., 117 Fairholm Road, Newcastle upon Tyne NE4 8AS

An article by the Political Economy Collective of the National CDP, tracing the development of the Project and outlining the position of the CDP workers on the question of community work. "CDP in general has been a small scale attempt by the State to control at a local level the activities of the working class which is being resisted by project workers."

REPORT AND ANALYSIS OF A COMMUNITY LAW CENTRE.

£1.00 from Newham Rights Centre, 309 Barking Road, East Ham, London E6 1LA.

Comprehensive analysis of the law centre movement and summary of the functions of law centres in general, with the approach and working of Newham Law Centre reported in detail.

local authorities. In either case, the profit motive is absent, though the former are required by the Government to cover their costs while the latter are under severe pressure to reduce subsidy payments. Most bus routes lose money, and any surplus earned on "profitable" routes is used by the operators to offset losses on others. So if community groups seek to displace an established operator from an existing route, or to compete with him, he may have a perfectly valid reason for opposing an application to the Traffic Commissioners. If the likely effect of a group's activity is to cream off the more viable bits of the operator's market, leaving him with only the less popular routes or parts of the day, the net result will be a deterioration in services generally - even though the group's chosen route may be improved.

Yours Sincerely,

John Cartledge, 5 Haddon Close, Boreham Wood, Hertfordshire, WD6 1UP.

LETTERS

Send your letters to
Community Action,
P.O. Box 665,
London SW1 X 8DZ

Dear Community
Action,



Much will be written in the coming months of the demise of the Community Project in Batley and I do not intend here to present my own views on this. I would, however, like to dispel the myths created by the article 'Batley Tenants Betrayed' in the last issue of C/A (no. 23, p. 11) and to refute totally the unfounded allegations.

Before applying for the advertised post at Batley C.D.P. I contacted the Chairman of the Association of Community Workers (A.C.W.) and received a letter from him, dated March 7, 1975, which stated:

"Further to our recent telephone conversation, I can confirm that the housing action job that you are interested in in Batley has not (my underlining) been officially blacked by the Council of A.C.W."

Arrears

As the author of a proposal to do an action-research project on rent arrears I feel particularly bitter about the way in which Mr Laver's article selected particular phrases from the non-secret document and succeeded in completely destroying the context to give a totally misleading impression. The object of the exercise was to prove that a local authority need never resort to evicting tenants for arrears in rent. It is a widely held belief in housing case work that every eviction for rent arrears is a failure on behalf of the housing department, as sufficient methods are available to ensure arrears don't occur. The objective of the proposal was to prove that this is the case and that it is the housing department that is inadequate in cases of arrears and not the tenants.

Focus on the family

Mr Laver made much of the list of techniques, attachment of earnings, etc., that were indeed in my proposal. He did not however include the sentence immediately before this list which ran as follows:

"The techniques used would include any or all of the following, but it must be emphasised that the techniques themselves are secondary to and tools of the approach itself, which is one of relating to the individual problems of the particular family."

Mr Laver concludes by stating that CDP is dead and offers his own views on the reasons for this, in particular he states, "local working

class groups forced the Labour Party into the open over a gradual period of time, and this has shown that CDP could only be a repressive organisation".

Batley reacts

The contradictions of the whole article are surely focussed in this particular statement for if it is true then the only logical reason for the Local Authority closing the CDP would be that the Local Authority was non-repressive. This is something Mr Laver would never admit to.

The author cannot have it both ways, either CDP was a 'repressive organisation', in which case the Local Authority would have had no reason to stop funding it, or CDP was engaging in certain activities that were unacceptable to the Local Authority, in which case they would cease funding. It is an historical fact the funding was withdrawn.

David Mylan, ex-Housing Action Worker, Batley CDP. February 5, 1976.

For reasons of space we have had to cut both the above letter and the reply below. Eds.

ACT replies

The article in the last issue of C/A represented the collective views of the ACT Management Group. Council control was built into the CDP set up. CDP was a repressive organisation and it was closed down by Kirklees Council. The council wanted a tame CDP, and failed to get it. But the project was controlled by right wing Labour councillors and was used to try to repress local groups. That failed too.

ACT believe that the actual plans for rent collection, despite their liberal approach, were fascist and in the end were a way of forcing all tenants to pay more rent. The high level of rents in relation to the level of income is the key issue, not other ways of collecting the rent.

All jobs in Batley with 'a community work content' were blacked by the Association of Community Workers and all those applying for other CDP jobs were strongly advised not to accept them.

INVESTIGATORS HANDBOOK

A guide for tenants, workers and action groups on how to investigate companies, organisations and individuals. Details hundreds of sources of information and explains where to find it. how to use it. Only 30p (inc post.) from Community Action, P.O. Box 665, London SW1X 8DZ

YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT

heating campaigns

4 issues for 80p

Tenants out in the Cold(11): the drawbacks of modern heating systems on new council estates
How to beat your Meter(16): how to act against landlords illegally overcharging for supplying gas and electricity; Power to the People(17): how to get out of debt with gas and electricity boards; your rights during and after conversion; squatters rights to supply; deposits; how to complain; Money to burn: whose fuel crisis?(23): how to get help with fuel costs; information on local campaigns; proposals to campaign around; problems experienced by tenants associations and tactics which have and could be used.

CPO'S 7 issues for £1.30

CPO: Your rights in the process(9): covers every stage from the council decision to rehousing; compensation; council methods;
The Politics of CPO's(10): misuse; non-use; social and economic effects of local government finance on CPO's; CPO's for Housing(10): slum clearance; housing gain; improvement; mixed development; protection of furnished tenancies; empty properties; case studies: CPO's for open space, commerce industry and education(11): procedures involved in land appropriation; information on compensation; CPO's for Motorways and Roads(12): community organisation issues and how they affect and relate to the CPO process; Public Enquiries and CPO's(13): how to fight for and against a CPO; how to get money; inquiry procedures; case study; Tactics for fighting and hastening CPO's(14): general points and tactics; the process of rehousing and redevelopment after a CPO is confirmed; Action Committee fights Housing Crisis(18): the story of a campaign against a CPO.

Tenants & Workers Joint Action

3 issues for 60p

Residents and Workers Unite(11): industrial initiatives with community links and community action with industrial or union backing;
Tenants and Workers(22): the need for joint action; how to make contact with unions; details of workers organisations; Trades Councils(16): how they work; the role they can play in linking the struggle at work and at home.

fighting the cuts

4 issues for 80p

Screws are on(18): the political motives and choices behind the cuts; the effects they will have; the relationship between local and central government; How Local Government works(18): where local authorities get their money; how decisions are made; Editorial and A Cut above the Tories(21): the background of the cuts; what they are; campaigns and reactions against them; how to find out about cuts in your area; campaign roundup; Counter Attack(22): the growing resistance to the cuts; why the city wants them; a summary of government circulars; cuts timetable; campaign roundup; Profit and Loss in the Cuts Account(23): the relationship between cuts, wage restraint and unemployment; what's behind the economic crisis; who profits and who loses; points to help determine tactics for organisation and action.

ACTION & THE POLICE

3 issues for 60p

A three part report on the laws which affect direct action by tenants and community groups and the role of the police in trying to control it. The report covers: marches, processions, public meetings(14); occupations, blocking of streets, police involvement in squatting, landlord/tenant disputes(15); picketing, flyposting, street selling, collections, what to do if you're arrested, and how to complain against the police(16).

ACTION NOTES

4 issues for 85p

How to organise and run public meetings(19): what kind, what purpose, time place, preparation, the running and controlling of meetings;
How to organise a petition(20): whether and how to use petitions; the form one could take; how to organise one; Constitutions(21): why is a constitution necessary? what to include; complicated constitutions; Writing a Report(22): is a report relevant to your campaign? who to aim at; what to put in; putting it together; costing and pricing; what to do to launch it.

Workers Wanted

2 full-time community workers required to develop work with adults and/or children (ages 6-18), including community newspaper, local issues, school projects, and evening activities. Ability/willingness to share administration necessary. Salary £30-£45 per week. Apply immediately to Jill Halsey, Interplay Trust, 65 Hall Lane, Leeds 12. Tel. 0532-634380, stating experience and qualifications.

LAW CENTRE

Law Centre - requires a first solicitor to join existing team of community workers. Experience in housing, immigration and welfare law desirable. Salary £4,000 p.a. Further details from Saltley Action Centre, 2 Alum Rock Road, Birmingham 8.

Council tenancy agreements

The National Consumer Council is doing some work on Council tenancy agreements. Our starting point is that tenancy conditions should include less restrictions on tenants, and should state the Council's obligations as landlord, as well as the tenants' responsibilities. We want to hear the views of as many tenants' associations as possible before formulating our proposals. We would like to hear from any tenants' groups who have been negotiating with the Council about their tenancy agreement, or who are interested in getting their tenancy conditions changed. Please contact: (England) Petra Griffiths, Shelter, 86 Strand, London WC2, Tel. 01-836 2051. (Wales) David Radford, NCC, 8 St. Andrews Place, Cardiff, Tel. 0222 25416/27311 (Scotland) Adrian Shaw, NCC, 4 Somerset Place, Glasgow G3, Tel. 041 332 3377.

REPORTS & THINGS

A Report of a Survey of Empty Property in Three Wards in the London Borough of Southwark 30p from Campaign for the Homeless and Rootless, 27, Endell Street, London WC2. Results of a detailed survey plus recommendations about the possible uses of the empty property.

Homeless Children in Southwark, 30p from Southwark Forum, Cambridge House, 131 Camberwell Road, London S.E.5.

A survey on the degree of homelessness, and recommendations about possible solutions.

Crisis Report 'Who's next for the chop?' (The Essential Facts on Unemployment), 30p + 15 p + p from CIS, 9 Poland Street, London W1. This report accuses the Government of using the financial crisis to create a level of unemployment unprecedented since the War; of being party to a massive shakeout of labour in the private sector and an attack on jobs in the public sector; of blatantly misleading the public by its assertion that unemployment is a temporary phenomenon which will evaporate at the next boom; and finally of planning an age of permanent unemployment.

Book a Bookstall

If Learning Alternatives, Learning Materials, Children's Rights, Play & Playspace, Children & Social Attitudes, Pre-school Activities, Children & the Community, and more, are your concern SCHOOL WITHOUT WALLS can supply you with an attended bookstall, with a wide range of stock, for your Community Happening, Campus Event, Conference, AGM etc. at no charge (unless you happen to buy a book). Books, Pamphlets, Magazines, etc. Interested? Contact Bob White, 42 Clifton Gardens London W.9 (All other SWW enquires to School Without Walls, c/o Sally Holder, 25 Nassington Road, London N.W.3)

Subscribe to Community Action

.... INVESTIGATORS HANDBOOK @ 30p each
 HOW TO FIGHT FOR BETTER HOUSING CONDITIONS (see page)
 SUBSCRIPTION (£1.20 for 6 issues, or more if you can afford it. £1.50 abroad. £2.00 to libraries, local authorities, businesses, etc. Single copies 18p+9p postage).
 Start with issue No.
 BACK ISSUES OF COMMUNITY ACTION issues nos. 5, 6, and 8-18 @ 15p each + 9p postage for single copy, 5p per copy for more than one back issue. No. 19 onwards @ 18p each + postage. Package of all the back issues: £3.40 (saving 35p). Specify Nos.

COMMUNITY ACTION
 P.O. Box 665
 London SW1X 8DZ

NAME
 ADDRESS
 POST CODE I enclose a cheque/PO for.....

COMMUNITY ACTION

18p

no 25 April-May 1976

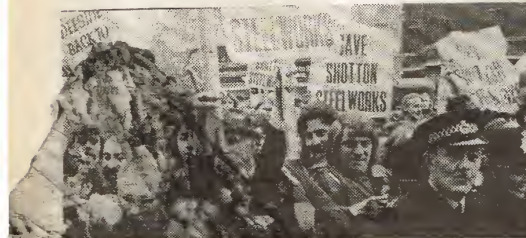


THIS IS THE GATE OF HEAVEN

COMMUNITY ACTION

CONTENTS no. 25!

- 2 Editorial
- 3 News & Views
- 11 Cuts Campaigns
- 13 Council Housing: ActionReport 2
- 29 Heating Round-up
- 31 Zebra Crossings
- 34 Fighting for a Code of Clearance
- 37 A.I.P. - Death of a Property Giant
- 38 Reports & Things
- 39 Information Exchange



Editorial Group

Bob Ellis Nick Sharman
 Dave Ferris Peter Higgins
 Simon Berwick Dexter Whitfield
 Philip Pearson

THANKS to the following for their help:
 Jenny McClelland, Jim Challings, Sally Pennington
 Gill Davies, Graham Worby, John Haddy,
 Maureen Smith, Nick Barnede, Judy Wisardi,

Many thanks also to those who helped with the
 ACTION REPORT on Council Housing: Including
 Roger Berwick, Bernard Kilroy, Dave Yates,
 Juliette Johnson, Sam Smith.

Published by

Community Action

PO Box 665

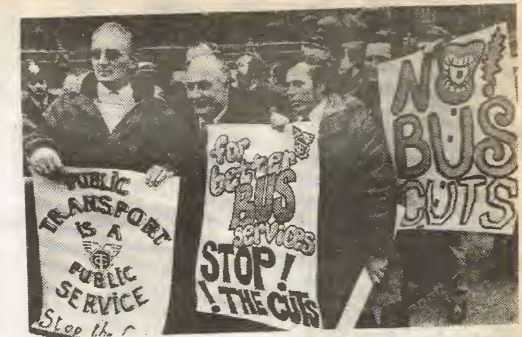
London SW1X 8DZ

phone 01-235-3465 (evenings only)

COMMUNITY ACTION is an entirely independent, non-profit magazine. All those involved are unpaid.

Printed by: Granam Andrews Web Offset Ltd.

19, Underwood Road, Reading.



EVERYONE OUT FOR 26th MAY

On May 26th local demonstrations against unemployment and the cuts will take place all over Britain. They will be organised by Trades Councils, Shop Stewards Committees and other rank and file groups.

The demonstrations aren't only for Trade Unionists - they aren't the only people hit by the drop in living standards planned by the Government, CBI and TUC.

The 26th is an opportunity for all groups who suffer from these policies to demonstrate their solidarity and their determination to fight the cuts - tenants' and residents' groups, transport and nursery campaign, teachers, pensioners, claimants, and others.

A SHOW OF STRENGTH IS VITAL!



NEWS & VIEWS

SUNDERLAND

MILLFIELD DEFEATS COUNCIL BLIGHTERS!

Millfield in Sunderland is an area of older, mostly high density, cottage properties, many of which had been improved using the grants available from the council and by the residents spending a great deal of their own hard-earned cash.

The 'Millfield Blight' was always hovering like a vulture. Council policy was forever changing and numerous unnecessary surveys were carried out. The final bombshell dropped in October 1975, following a period of relative stability, when the local newspaper headlined "The Millfield Study - 253 homes threatened with demolition". The residents were dumbfounded, many were distressed and worried, and all 1300 were extremely angry. They responded by saying: "The Millfield Study, this officers report, is made up of generalisations, lies, contradictions and we intend to expose it for what it is."

Street Action

Street Action groups were formed and with the help of two local sociologists, who were also ex-councillors, we went into battle. Our own councillors were extremely sympathetic and helped in every way possible. The local press were great, giving us more or less non-stop coverage for over 3 months. Hardly a week and sometimes a day went by without an article on the Millfield Saga. Councillors were bombarded with letters demanding information on the vague promise of public participation, demanding copies of the infamous

Millfield Study and demanding answers to many other questions. We harried, we lobbied, not only Housing Committee Councillors but our local MP, who was very sympathetic to our cause, and we harried the DoE about their involvement in helping to produce the Millfield Study

Councillors' apathy

A great many petitions on a variety of subjects were submitted to the council. And every councillor who sits on the Housing Committee was sent a personal invitation to visit the area. It was very disturbing to note the complete lack of interest shown by the coun-

certies, the result being that the house was still classed as "unfit". This we said was either untrue or there had been misuse of government funds and ratepayers' money in that improvement grants can only be given if the whole house is brought up to standard. If this was the case we threatened to take these facts to the District Auditor. We also stated that we would have to go to the Local Ombudsman on various other issues.

National publicity

After holding a public meeting of our own at which only 5 out of the 29 councillors invited bothered to attend,



cillors not from Millfield who were to say the least "conspicuous by their absence".

Officers report 'lies'

We also set out to disprove the many incorrect statements in the Millfield Study. One prime example of the ineptitude of the officers who had produced the report was their statement that improvement grants had been given with which residents had built on to the existing "unfit" pro-

we began to attract the attention of the national press and television. An article appeared in the Times followed by the Daily Mail, both highlighting the dilemma of people faced with the "final solution" of clearance. Interviews on both Independent and BBC local news programmes quickly followed. When the council's own public meeting finally took place, they faced an audience of well informed, knowledgeable people

who had a vast amount of public sympathy on their side.

'Study' rejected

We didn't argue over the fitness of the houses. We completely destroyed the Study and its recommendations, and put the case of improvement as a solution once the blight of uncertainty had been removed.

The headline in the local press this time was in our favour: "The battle for Millfield is over, victory for the residents. Council to apply to Minister of Environment for Housing Action Area status for Millfield."

A battle won by the people of Millfield, a prime example of the power of community uniting in a common cause and winning against all odds.

The Future?

And what of the future? We think that the first HAA in Sunderland can work, and can fulfill the needs of the vast majority of the people. But only with our help. We will not rest until representatives of the various street committees are invited to contribute in a meaningful way.

Ann Pickering, 55 Lime St, Sunderland.

LEICESTER

LEICESTER GROUPS WIN OFFICE BAN

In December 1974 a number of Leicester groups decided to use the occasion of the Structure Plan Examination to protest against the conversion of homes to offices and against the waste of resources represented by a million square feet of empty offices.

Leicester Squatters started the campaign with a 24 hour occupation of Leicester's new £6m civic centre, which was then empty. Later in the week at the Examination in Public (the inquiry into the Structure Plan), Shelter and the Leicester Environmental Act-



DEMONSTRATORS OUTSIDE THE STRUCTURE PLAN INQUIRY

ion Group put forward the case for banning the conversion of homes to offices. They pointed out that 32 dwelling units had been converted into offices between June 1973 and December 1974, while over 20% of Leicester's office floorspace was vacant and there were 12,500 applicants on the housing waiting list. The County and City Planning Officers argued against a ban on office conversions, basing their case on an incorrect interpretation of the law. At this point a group of homeless people entered the Examination and unfurled a 34 foot wide 'Homes Before Offices' banner.

Homes before offices

The case for an office ban was later expanded into a report (Homes Before Offices, February 1975, available from Shelter, 13 Welford Road, Leicester, 10p plus postage). With the help of sympathetic councillors, this report was discussed by the controlling Labour group of the Leicester City Council. Subsequently the council resolved that:

"When considering a proposal for the change of use of premises to offices (the planning committee) should exercise a presumption against such a change of use where

it would result in the loss of residential accommodation or an overall increase in office floorspace."

Proposed new policy

In February 1976 the Department of the Environment officially agreed that there were too many empty offices in Leicester and proposed to include the following new policy in the Leics. Structure Plan:

"A general presumption against office development in the central area of Leicester, particularly where this

HOUSE-HUNTING?

Then this could be just the place you're looking for.

It stands in six acres of grounds... Plenty of room for the missus's prize dahlias.

There are two big games rooms... No need to pop down to the British Legion for a game of snooker.

And you can forget Blackpool this year... Just relax in the two swimming pools—or laze around in the solarium.

There's even an aviary... A sort of top people's pigeon loft.

But you may have a spot of bother getting a mortgage for all this luxury. It will cost you ONE MILLION POUNDS.

That is what former Pricerite supermarket tycoon Geoffrey Kaye—now a tax exile—is asking for this seven-bedroomed Mock Tudor mansion in exclusive Totteridge Lane, North London.

He bought it for £135,000 four years ago.

Daily Mirror

would lead to loss of residential use."

So this campaign has been almost entirely successful in achieving its objective - namely to ban new office development particularly where this would lead to a loss of housing. Indeed it is possibly the first example of a useful policy change which was initiated by public representations to a Structure Plan Examination. (For the more usual situation see report on the Coventry Examination in C/A no.15.)

More rented housing!

Leicester groups also used the Examination in Public to campaign for more rented housing in the city's suburbs. They pointed out that only 15% of recent housing completions in Leicester's suburbs were for rent, compared with 59% in Leicester. They argued that the district councils around Leicester were ignoring and effectively exporting their housing responsibilities and that these authorities should be required to provide sufficient land for rented housing.

Moderate success

The local groups argued that such social issues were relevant to the Structure Plan. They referred to the 1972 Town and Country Planning (Structure and Local Plan) Regulations which laid down that Structure Plans could contain "the regard that the local authority have had to social issues". They added that housing tenure was specifically mentioned in the DoE's Structure Plan Advice Note 7/73 on Social Aspects of Development Plans, in the DoE's authoritative Development Plans Manual (HMSO, 1970), and in the Secretary of State's draft modifications to the Greater London Development Plan (HMSO, 1973). However, the DoE's representative at the Examination replied that, as indicated in Circular 98/74, Structure Plans are restricted to land-use planning, and housing tenure is therefore irrelevant.

When the Secretary of State announced his draft modifications to the Leicestershire Structure Plan he retained the paragraph reading "To ensure that adequate supplies of land for residential purposes are made available ... to enable the demand for rented accommodation to be met", but took away its policy status. The campaign for more rented housing in Leicester's suburbs has therefore been far from successful.

Lessons for similar campaigns

We believe that a number of lessons, particularly for campaigns related to Structure Plans, can be drawn from our experience.

* Check out the facts and arguments used by civil servants and council officers. You cannot overestimate their ability to produce evidence that is in direct contradiction to known facts.

* Evidence by itself is unlikely to change policy unless backed up by favourable

publicity, substantial public support and lobbying of MPs, councillors and their advisors. At the Examination, representations should be aimed as much at the media as at the Panel conducting the Examination.

* If you wish your views to be considered by the Panel you must either make sure that your representations fall within the DoE's present narrow definition of Structure Planning or campaign to extend that definition.

Most important issues

We believe that the exclusion of social issues from Structure Plans further reduce their already doubtful value. Surely the social polarisation of our cities and the lack of rented housing are Structure Plan issues? Indeed these are probably the most important Structure Plan issues for homeless and working-class people.

Dave Brazier and Jim Wintour,
46 Bosworth Street, Leicester.
tel. 0533-536956.

Threat to Trades Councils



The TUC is trying to restrict the activities of Trades Councils (see C/A no.16, p.12, No. 22, p.18) many of whom are fighting unemployment and the cuts in public expenditure. They have introduced a new Rule 14 which states that "in no circumstances shall the Trades Council cooperate with or subscribe to the funds of any organisation whose policies or activities are contrary to

those of the Congress". For example whenever the TUC makes a deal with the Government, Trades Councils which organise and support opposition to all or part of deals like the 'social contract' may face suspension.

The new rule could also affect tenants groups seeking workers' support in fighting rent increases or cuts, etc. The TUC did nothing concrete during the struggle over the Housing Finance Act and are likely to do even less with Labour in power. Recent rent increases were an integral part of the 'Social Contract' and massive increases of £2.50 a week average are planned by the Government over the next two years (see p. 21).

Several Trades Councils have already been suspended for rejecting the new rule.

GLASGOW HEAVY BREATH IN HUTCHESONTOWN

Mrs Agnes Marshall rents just one of 1200 new flats built in Hutchesontown and Laurieston over the last 5 years to replace the Gorbals tenements. Since moving in 4 years ago, she has spent a fortune redecorating every six months. Yet the battle against dampness and fungus is in vain. Bedrooms redecorated before Christmas already show mouldy patches in the corners and fungus is growing on the back of the furniture.

Mouldy design

The widespread problem of dampness became apparent only 8 - 10 weeks after the first flats were occupied. Now some 60% have been affected in some degree, with about 30% made almost uninhabitable. The problems of mould, water beetles and fungus are certainly caused by condensation, but this is not something which council officials are prepared to attribute to design defects or structural omissions, eg. lack of insulation, designing bedrooms with four external wall surfaces.

Tenants 'social habits'

In fact, if Glasgow Corporation is to be believed, the dampness is the fault of the tenants' "social habits". Council officials have even said that tenants' "heavy breathing" is to blame!

Over the year many attempts have been made by the tenants to get something done, eg. rent strikes, petitions, deputations to the local city chambers, letters to the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State, local MP - all failed! One tenant has paid no rent for one year and one of his bedrooms is completely evacuated, but he has only been ignored by the council. Many tenants now sleep in the living rooms. The bedrooms are uninhabitable.

Since October 1975 the tenants association has intensified its campaign and with the aid of local TV, radio and press a great deal of publicity has been given to the pro-



blem. At a public meeting, tenants unanimously decided to call for a public enquiry to be held into the problem and to take legal action against the council. In November a small number of tenants started to take legal proceedings. This resulted in the council calling for a full-scale investigation at a committee meeting in February 1976. The first official recognition in 4 years!

Secret investigation

No details of the council's investigation have been as yet released. As far as we are aware it is not independent and is being carried out in secret by council employees.

And not only is their own investigation a 'secret' one, but the council have also refused to allow access to plans, schedules and other documents by the Architects and other professionals from 2 local universities who are giving free help to the tenants. The reports by the experts will be used as potential evidence by the tenants.

Medical evidence

Local G.P.s have criticised the dampness as a general health hazard, and support the tenants' campaign, but cannot say whether it has or will cause a specific complaint. Chest specialists say that bronchial and asthmatic

complaints will certainly be made worse by the conditions found in the flats and could possibly be caused by them.

On a more general level, the depressive effect of living with mould and fungus has been, most distressing, particularly for housewives and the house-bound sick. The black, wet walls give an impression of a dirty, unkempt flat. No amount of effort can remove the unpleasant smell which affects furnishings and clothing.

Sauna bath - only £200

The only answer the council seems to have is to tell the tenants to open all windows and turn on all fires. One tenant obeyed this counsel of perfection and he received a bill for his electricity for £200. The problem in his home only got worse. The more heat used in these flats the higher the humidity. It is like living in a sauna bath.

Without a structural remedy to the flats, any amount of heating and ventilation will have no effect.

The law in Scotland is different to that in England and the recent Portsmouth case (see C/A No 22 p5) is of no real legal significance. It does however, give us reason to be optimistic and gives us an insight into the defence put forward by a council to deny its tenants healthy, hygienic and habitable homes

Condensation not a health hazard!

The Statute Law in Scotland is the Public Health Act (Scotland) 1897. Any nuisance which exists must be shown to be a health hazard or potent-



ial health hazard. To date, condensation has not been considered to come within the scope of this Act. The main flaw in this legislation is that the council combines the role of accused and prosecutor. Unfortunately, as the Environmental Health Officers, who are responsible for checking if a statutory nuisance exists, are council employees, it is nearly impossible to expect them to go against the council in court. If our flats had been owned by a private landlord, the Council would long ago have recognised the health hazard and taken legal action against the landlord.

Legal Action

The common law duty of care owed to a tenant by a landlord will also play an important part in supporting the tenants' action. If it could be shown that the Council failed in this duty, the tenants would have to be compensated. Most tenants have lost something because of the

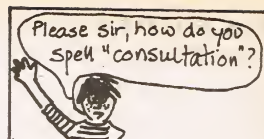
damp and mould - carpets, furniture, time lost at work due to more colds and flu etc. In some cases losses are as high as £1,000.

Use the media

Without a doubt the most effective weapon the tenants have is unity and publicity. Single handed, no tenant in this area ever achieved anything. The power of the media was enormous. Glasgow District Council only ordered an investigation after a media campaign and a possibility of legal action.

To date the legal action is progressing rapidly and the necessary detailed evidence is being gathered. It is hoped to be in a position of deciding the legal basis for our case in about 6 weeks.

Thanks to William Roxburgh, Hutchesontown and Laurieston Tenants Association, Laurieston Information Centre, 80, Stirlingfauld Place, Glasgow G5 9BX



did was to write to the Town Clerk asking what 'consultation' meant. The reply was that it did not include negotiation but the group could rest assured that whatever consultation was it would take place soon!



Delaying tactics

In order to push the officers not to delay their report, and to make sure that the residents as well as the officers' views reached the committee, the group produced architects plans for the rehabilitation of the houses and landscape architects plans for the redesign of the park.

These showed that instead of demolishing houses, derelict sites could be used for an extension of the gardens. The plans were shown at an exhibition at the neighbourhood centre along with a tape and slide show.

200 people visited the exhibition in the 4 days it was open. The group invited the heads of the relevant departments, the Recreation Sub-Committee members and the 2 local councillors, but none of them turned up - though

CAMDEN

FIGHT THE BLIGHT

In 1951 the London County Council's initial Development Plan proposed enlarging St Martin's Gardens, a small park in Camden, by knocking down 67 houses.

It would have taken place over 54 years if the scheme had gone according to plan. But it hasn't and for 25 years now a part of Camden Town has been blighted.

Action Group formed

There had been a lot of local opposition over the years, but a campaign to get the scheme dropped really began in 1975. An Action Group was formed because residents felt that:

- * the loss of housing wasn't justified as the gardens were underused
- * demolishing houses would further reduce the numbers of people using the gardens
- * it was totally unreasonable of the council to allow the blight to continue
- * the council were both ignor-

ing and attempting to discredit residents' opposition to the scheme.

What's consultation?

Before forming the Action Group residents had presented the Recreation and Open Spaces Sub-Committee with a petition, and at this meeting the Committee had asked officers to report back on the scheme and promised 'consultation' with residents.

The first thing the Action Group



the two councillors did come the next day.

This reinforced the group's expectations that the council would not co-operate. So they took the tape and slide show to the Committee and sent them and all the Directors of the Departments a copy of their report.

The fight goes on

Finally, in March 1976, the Leisure Services Committee put the issue on the agenda as a main item. 6 councillors spoke against the council's scheme, no-one for.

But the campaign has not yet been won. The Committee recommended that part of the scheme be delayed, and that the issue would be reconsidered at a future date (now set for September) after 'consultation' with the 'public' and after preparation of another officers' report and a Works Dept. plan for the redesigning of the gardens.

For further info. and the Report (30p incl postage): St Martin's Gardens Action Group c/o Neighbourhood Centre, 12 Greenland Rd, London NW1 (01-267-5270)

ISLINGTON

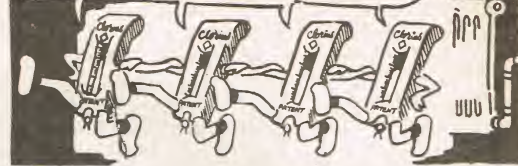
TENANTS VICTORY- COMPULSORY PURCHASE FOR IMPROVEMENT

After a great deal of pressure from the tenants in Birnam Road Housing Action Area, (see C/A no.23 p.4), the Greater London Council was finally forced to admit the failure of its policy of voluntary improvement by landlords, and has agreed to apply for a Compulsory Purchase Order(CPO) on 40 of the worst houses. If the CPO is confirmed, these 40 houses will at last be improved to provide decent homes for the tenants of the area.

Inquiry Result

In nearby Alexander Road, the largest ever CPO for improve-

ON IT'S GLORIOUS TO BE Clorius
THE METER THAT'S NOTORIOUS



The campaign against Clorius Meters (see C/A 23, p 31) is gathering momentum. More groups - from Rochdale, Liverpool, Whitham (Essex) and Washington New Town are in contact with groups in Manchester and Nottingham.

Further coordinated action is planned. Recently, the Building Research Station decided to do extensive tests on the meters next winter. The fact that there

is no legal protection for consumers of district heating has been taken up by the National Consumer Council.

In Nottingham - which has the ill-famed 'revolutionary' rubbish and coal burning district heating scheme (see C/A 19, p 4) the Council has decided not to extend the heating scheme to any more new houses in the Meadows. Instead individual solid fuel or gas systems will be installed in each house.

ment has recently been confirmed by the Dept. of the Environment. (For a report on the CPO Inquiry, see C/A no.21 p.9). 153 run-down houses are to be taken over by the council and improved for the existing tenants.

Forcing Action

These two victories should encourage tenants elsewhere to keep fighting and force councils to prevent exploitation of tenants by private landlords.

For further information contact: (Birnam Road) Alison McLean, Pooles Park Neighbourhood Co-op, 10 Tollington Park, London N4 (01 263-2027) (Alexander Road) Mrs Irene Watson (01-263-2168).

SCOTTISH TENANTS CONFERENCE

On April 24 & 25 something significant happened in Stirling. The Scottish Council of Tenants and Raploch Tenants Action Committee successfully gathered over 100

people representing more than 80 groups in the first Annual Conference of Tenants Groups in Scotland.

The opening speech was given by Jim Sillars, MP of the newly formed Scottish Labour Party, in which he attacked the record of the present government. He pointed out that it was gradually eroding the moral authority of the labour movement, and paving the way for even more regressive policies by future Conservative Governments.

Need for united action

The working class could no longer look for leadership to the Labour Government and the T.U.C. and tenants and workers would now have to put a much greater emphasis on the grass roots struggle for improvement in housing conditions and the reduction of unemployment; two things which he saw as very closely linked.

The rest of the opening day was devoted to discussion groups with an exhibition of community newspaper production.

The subjects discussed in the groups included: community control and participation; housing policy; community projects; tenants and trade unionists; newspapers and posters; and housing associations, cooperatives and municipalisation.

On the second day, reports back

from the discussion groups were heard and resolutions worked out at the discussion groups were debated.

Resolutions

The resolutions passed on the second day demanded:

- * high priority be given to housing construction and modernisation;
- * total opposition to the spending cuts imposed by central government;
- * that security of tenure be given to council tenants as least as good as that offered in the private sector;
- * the updating of the 1897 Public Health (Scotland) Act.

Given that this was the first such conference to be held, the organisers must be congratulated for:

- 1) taking the first steps towards giving tenants in Scotland a national voice;
- 2) involving the trade union movement (which was strongly represented) in the struggles of tenants and the questions of housing policy at the grass roots.

Hopefully the contacts and links made at this conference will strengthen the Scottish tenants movement so that this will indeed be the first of many conferences of this sort.

SOUTHWARK LOCAL RESIDENTS DEFIED IN FAVOUR OF PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT

Eight months after a Public Inquiry into one of the most crucial redevelopment proposals for Southwark's Thames-side, the Government has resolutely tossed aside the views of local residents and trade unionists and the GLC has come down firmly in favour of another private 'mixed development' scheme.

Disastrous precedent

At the Inquiry, 14 local organisations plus the local

Ward Labour Party argued that the scheme would create a disastrous precedent for other prize redevelopment sites on the South Bank such as Hays Wharf, Butlers Wharf, and Bankside. But Southwark Council, who have been negotiating with Laings for over 8 years, were wholly committed to the scheme.

Crosland's reasons

Laing's scheme is typical of 'mixed developments' now so popular with the Government and local authorities. It consists of a profit-making element of 177,000 sq. feet of net lettable office space, plus the usual 'planning gain' elements - a riverside walk and a plot of land for the Council to build housing.

Committed against public intervention

Crosland, in a letter to the local groups, said that he supported the proposal for 3 reasons, which are worth quoting:

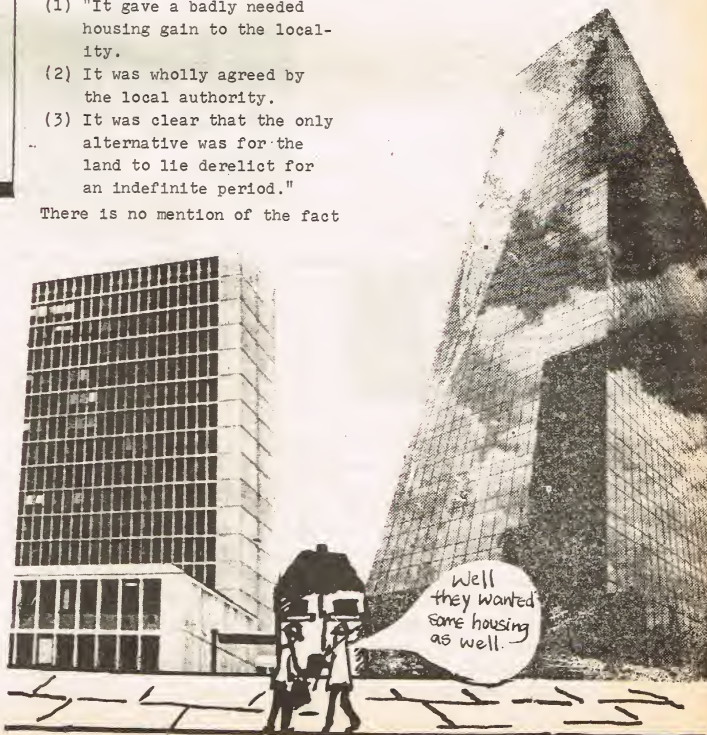
- (1) "It gave a badly needed housing gain to the locality.
- (2) It was wholly agreed by the local authority.
- (3) It was clear that the only alternative was for the land to lie derelict for an indefinite period."

There is no mention of the fact

that this scheme creates a very important precedent. Nor does Mr Crosland explain that Southwark would have to build the housing, nor is there any mention of the Community Land Act. None of this is surprising, more remarkable is that Mr. Crosland does not care to bring up the information he was well aware of, that the tenant who obtained the ODP (Office Development Permit) for the office building (Alexander Howden, Insurance Brokers) has found alternative premises, or that Laings have said that because of the various planning benefits they can't afford to build the scheme anyway. The unqualified commitment against public intervention and for private capital is the overwhelming reason for the decision.

Search for scapegoat

Southwark Council's Director of Development, Ceri Griffiths, goes even further than this. He told *The Times* on March 23: "I see the North



Southwark area as nourishing the City. The pity is that each site has become a battleground for conflicting interest."

Southwark Council's concern now is that the scheme won't be built and the Chairman of Planning is hunting for a scapegoat as eagerly as he can.

Groups blamed

In a confidential letter to Council members, he has blamed the delays on the GLC and local groups:

"If this continues, the potential of the idle land in North Southwark will not be achieved. No-one will put in the essential investment when the planning situation is so capricious."

"It is hoped", he goes on, "that this situation will not continue and that County Hall and even those who directly or indirectly have influence on these matters, such as local groups, will review the situation in the light of the Laings decision."

Local groups are certainly "reviewing the situation" and are preparing for even greater battles of principle over other sites on Southwark's Thames-side.

North Southwark Community Development Group, 108 Great Guildford St. London SE1

Notices to quit

Private Landlords Duty to Provide Information to Tenants

The rights of private tenants must be spelt out on Notices to Quit from 1st April.

Already the law has been strengthened so that four weeks notice must be given, in writing.

Now, any Notice to Quit which does not contain specific information on legal rights will be invalid.

The information to be given is as follows:

* Landlords must get a Court

CACTL CAMPAIGN AGAINST A CRIMINAL TRESPASS LAW

On 23 March, the Law Commission produced its final proposals on trespass offences. They form part of the Commission's Report No 76 on Conspiracy and Criminal Law Reform, and will shortly be put before Parliament as a draft Bill.

5 new offences:

Five new offences have been defined:

1 Using or threatening violence to gain entry to property against the wishes of persons present or entitled to be present on that property. Under this proposal, a 'displaced residential occupier' may take action to regain possession without being liable for the offence and the police will have powers

of arrest on the basis of 'reasonable suspicion'.
2 Refusal to leave a house when asked to do so by or on behalf of a displaced residential occupier.

3 Possession of an offensive weapon by a trespasser, with police powers of search without warrant and arrest on reasonable suspicion of an offence.

4 Trespass on a foreign embassy.

5 Obstructing a bailiff executing a High Court Order 113 or a County Court Order 26.

"Reasonable"

The Commission's proposals have been widely accepted in the media as reasonable steps to protect householders away on holiday and to prevent violence during evictions. In fact, only one of the new offences would be limited to residential situations, and some actually encourage violence.

The vague definition of the
(Continued on p.12)



Order for Possession even after the Notice has run out before a tenant can be lawfully evicted.

* 'protected tenants' - mainly those having 'absentee' landlords - must be informed that a Possession Order can only be granted by the courts on the grounds set out in the Rent Act - rent arrears, causing damage, etc.

* 'unprotected tenants' - mainly those with resident landlords - must be informed of their right to apply to a Rent Tribunal to postpone the Notice to Quit for up to 6 months. They must apply to the Tribunal before the Notice runs out.

* every tenant unsure of their rights can get advice from a law

centre, C.A.B., Housing Aid Centre, Rent Tribunal or Rent Officer.

* Tenants may be able to get Legal Aid towards the cost if they see a solicitor.

* N.B. 'Protected' and 'Unprotected' tenants rights were covered in C/A No 15 Page 36. Unfurnished tenants whose tenancy began before the new Rent Act came in (Aug 12 1974) are 'protected', whether or not the landlord lives in the house.

None of these new rights apply to council tenants, new town tenants or tenants of registered housing associations!! For more information see Legal Action Group Bulletin March 1976, Page 65.

FIGHT THEM!



This issue's round-up looks at examples of cuts campaigns in most of the regions, to give an idea about the extent and type of activity. It is not intended as a comprehensive review. There are however several general lessons:

- The reasons for the cuts in services and their increasing impact are not widely understood. There's a big need for continuing local information bulletins and newsheets which link rent rises, cuts in services, unemployment etc with the government's economic strategy.
- Locally based campaigns which use immediate local issues to illustrate the impact of general economic policies have usually been more successful than nationally organised demonstrations.
- It's not necessary to set up a specific campaign against the cuts - the issues can be raised at all kinds of meetings and organisations
- Campaigns which link the general issue of unemployment (which is widely understood) and the public spending cuts (which aren't) have often proved the most successful.

NORTH EAST

TYNESIDE's Action Committee against the Cuts is finding a broad union backing slow to develop. However, there's been individual union support for particular campaigns (eg support for NUPE to save Fleming hospital). One of the TACAC's four committees dealing with transport policy (the others deal with social services, housing and education) has successfully raised key local transport issues - especially the need for bus priority over cars. But TACAC's main achievement has been keeping the cuts alive as a political issue, especially among unions and other trades councils (similar initiatives are under way in Gateshead, Sunderland and Durham).

SOUTH WEST

BRISTOL's committee opposing cuts in the health service is monitoring reductions in services throughout Avon county. Their main finding is that small scale cuts are being made throughout the NHS - the closing of single wards, a hostel for mentally handicapped, a nurses home. There have been long delays in filling nursing and ancillary staff vacancies - to save wage bills. The most dramatic cut is the halving of the intake for nurses training. At the same time, wards are closed because of staff shortages. March's conference called by the South West Region of the TUC led to a united front among unionists opposing the cuts. There's been little more than token support since then: the main hope is for a big turnout at NUPE's demonstration in Taunton which has won AUEW and NUT support in opposing health service cuts.

NORTH WEST

MANCHESTER. A recent Saturday demonstration against the cuts and unemployment organised by the N.W. Region of the TUC attracted over 1000 activists. But there was clearly a need to raise rank and file interest and committee members of Manchester and Salford Housing Action plan to attend tenants groups meetings to discuss how the cuts affect local issues in the particular area. Other methods of raising local involvement: the tenants federation newsletter has a pull-out supplement on the cuts and a local theatre group is taking a 40-min play on the cuts around the area.

WEST MIDLANDS

BIRMINGHAM's Campaign Committee against the Cuts is holding local meetings throughout the city, covering health, education and housing issues. It's also produced a bulletin to provide information and extend its union support. So far rank and file interest has been limited and there's an urgent need to bring in unions apart from those with public service members. (1 Finch Rd, Loxells, Birmingham 19)

YORKSHIRE

LEEDS. A 200 strong demonstration backed with a 4000-signature petition prevented the closure of 3 wash-houses as part of a wider campaign against social services cuts. The Leeds Campaign against the Cuts has built up union support, mainly in the public sector unions. It holds weekly meetings and produces a regular bulletin. Each issue covers different aspects of the cuts. (16 Methley Tce, Leeds 7)

BARNESLEY. Protest earlier this year at the council's planned "savings" of £3.3m on education spending had strong Trades Council backing and brought together unions and parents in a fight to reinstate the planned budget. But there was only a partial victory - a £1m cut was later agreed. Over 50 teaching vacancies are currently unfilled and careers advisory and youth service posts have not been filled.

SCOTLAND

ABERDEEN Trades Council held a March cuts conference and has formed a working committee to co-ordinate the campaign with community groups as well as trade union representation. (People's Press, 167 King Street, Aberdeen)

DUNDEE's March protest against the Cuts was one of the strongest in the country. Over 30,000 people struck for a day and 8000 marched on the city centre.

LONDON

EAST LONDON Action Committee against the Cuts is mainly centres around hospital cuts. Recently it has extended action to two school closures. ELAC is holding a May 15th conference though response so far has been slow. Several union organisations and tenants associations however have now given ELAC formal backing.

(Continued from p. 10)

individual offences leaves them wide open to abuse against those involved in wider forms of direct action such as sit-ins and factory occupations.

The crime of adverse occupation of residential property and the right of 'self-help' evictions given to displaced residential occupiers are both based on the total myth that squatters regularly occupy lived-in houses. Absolutely no evidence for this exists. The right of self-help and of its execution by agents is an open invitation to violence by gangs of heavies, and will promote pseudo-occupation by landlords and property companies.

Under the Forcible Entry offence the word of a caretaker that he had been threatened with violence at the beginning of an occupation would be sufficient to require arrests by the police.

Peaceful property occupation

The offence of trespass with an offensive weapon provides a clear means of breaking occupations by giving the police a right of entry without warrant into squatters homes or into student and factory sit-ins. This proposal is discriminatory and totally ignores the invariably peaceful nature of property occupation.

The offence of obstructing bailiffs, giving them powers of arrest, represents a substantial increase in their powers. Yet, frequently they are agents of the landlords with a vested interest in the eviction. Even passive resistance would be made criminally liable.

ISLINGTON. A March conference against the cuts attracted only 58 people, despite distribution of 20,000 leaflets. Few people from previous protests - eg over Liverpool Rd Hospital, Section 105 money, Canonbury Day Centre, etc - attended. This is partly blamed on local political splits and on a failure to spread information about the cuts and seek broader support among tenants associations, union branches and so on, before the delegate conference was held.

If the implementation of these laws is to be successfully resisted it is vital that their broad threat to direct action is made widely known. All those interested should contact CACTL, c/o 6 Bowden St, London SE11 (01-289-3877)



CCPs FIRST AND LAST?

CCPs (Comprehensive Community Programmes) were announced by the Home Office in July 1974 as a "new strategy for tackling urban deprivation". Four have been set up in England and Wales (see C/A 15 & 23) and now a report on Scotland's first CCP has come our way. It is being set up in Craignenk, Motherwell.

According to the report, written as an 'advice note' by the Scottish Development Department, Scottish local authorities should now define and "deal with" poverty on an area basis.

Not all areas, however, can be "dealt with". The report says: "authorities will be forced into having to choose from a large number of deprived areas those which require immediate attention, given limited resources and manpower."

The total sop

This statement is an admission of the failure of existing government policies - on regional employment, job training, housing schemes, etc. And it shows why CCPs should be totally

condemned as a sop. Not only are "only minimal additional resources to be available" in CCP areas, but even this will be at the expense of other working class areas from which money and resources will be taken. Yet another smokescreen for public expenditure cuts!

Hide the facts

Planning in Scotland has a feature not found in England and Wales - the 'Regional Report'. These are produced alongside council's Structure and Local Plans, and have an additional attraction - no public inquiry and no public participation is required under law!

The SDD Report says that 'deprived areas' should only be identified in the Regional Reports, so that they do not get publicised, and the public is not consulted.

Deception

The report proposes to set up "area teams" to work with local residents. These teams will include representatives from the Housing Department, the police, the DHSS and social work departments. In this neat exercise in deception, residents' groups are to be drawn into a monitoring programme whose purpose is kept secret. They are also expected to collaborate in this exercise with organisations that are themselves part of the problem!

The SDD has come up with no proposals for better housing, for attracting industry, for working with the unions, improving amenities and transport. But of course that would mean tackling the problem, and they haven't finished talking yet.

PART 2

NO SELL-OUT!

The 'Sell Council Houses' campaign continues in the press. The Building Societies Association and many others have recently taken up the attack. In a widely-publicised report, the Building Societies said: "If council houses are not sold, the inevitable result will be higher prices."

This sort of nonsense inevitably attracts wide coverage. The careless lending of the Building Societies caused the boom in house prices in 1972/3, and the amount of money released by these Societies still mainly decides the level of house prices!

The Associations then suggested there was already an "excess supply" of council houses!

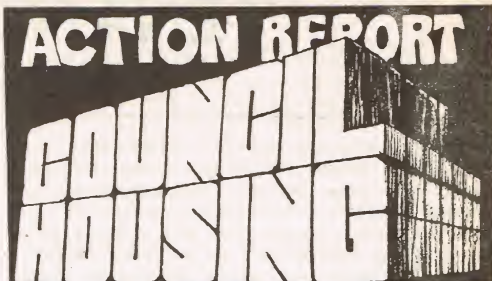
With increasing homelessness, arguments like these about a housing 'surplus' do not stand up to any examination. In which major town or city in Britain are there too many council houses?

Profit Motive

Those who lead the assault on council housing do so because it goes against the sacred principle of private ownership and market competition. They conveniently forget that the state was forced to step in because the "free market" couldn't provide decent housing at a reasonable price.

They forget, too, that the free market pushed up the price of all housing - even council housing. The profit motive is exposed in the cost of land, construction and borrowing.

In stark contrast, the costs of council housing are shared among all tenants - through the "rent pooling" system, which we explain here.



Against Selling

So there are two crucial arguments against selling council houses:

★ It undermines the whole basis of "rent pooling", where rents from older council houses help to even out the higher cost of new houses.

★ Selling council houses will increase public spending, not reduce it. Each time a house is sold, the new buyer pays the full market price and claims the full income tax relief on the mortgage.
INCOME TAX RELIEF ON MORTGAGES LAST YEAR ALONE AMOUNTED TO £1050 MILLION!

The constant demand for new mortgage relief amounts to a far greater public cost than the original cost of the building - it's obvious!

The council housing 'Sales Drive' is led by the same groups who also support the housing cuts. This is no coincidence! Tenants and workers have already faced savage cuts in health, social services, education.

THERE IS NO OPTION - WE MUST FIGHT THE ATTACK ON COUNCIL HOUSING.

CONTENTS

IN THE LAST ISSUE

- Fight the new attack
- Its always been a struggle
- The housing market: big business & you
- Why council housing is important today
- Community facilities: places to meet, play & relax

IN THIS ISSUE

- Tenants rights
- Who gets housed
- Who pays & who profits - rents, rates & subsidies
- Equity sharing - a new attack
- Tenants control

IN ISSUE NO. 26

- 'Reforms' which threaten council housing
- The property lobby
- Tenants organisation & action
- The struggle ahead

TENANTS RIGHTS

THE LEGAL JUNGLE

Tenants' rights are councils' obligations. That's one of the reasons why you don't hear very much about them. More important, governments have tended to regard council housing as second best, and the Tories in particular have always given it lower status than housing in the 'free' market. It is well known that council tenants are subject to a mass of petty restrictions, which allow free rein for paternalistic attitudes on the part of officials and councillors.

A Right farce

That the political parties accept all this is shown by the state of the law: there is no separate legislation on council tenants' rights, and no plans for any. Contrast this with the hue and cry over tenants' rights in the private sector and the frequent changes in legislation.

This means that there's no point in looking to MPs to press for improvements - still less to councillors. The impetus will have to come from tenants themselves - through their own organisations.

One-way deal

Only the tenants responsibilities to the council are spelled out in the so-called tenancy "agreement". The details are usually on the back of the rent book, and we explain what they mean here.

It is rare for any of the councils responsibilities to the tenant to be contained in any agreement. Instead the tenant has to rely on the duties and obligations either 'implied' by common law (that part of the law recognised and established by the decisions of the court and unchanged by Parliament), or imposed by statute, (laws passed by Parliament). Since the council's obligations aren't spelled out anywhere else, we start with them here!

In TENANTS RIGHTS we look at the 'common law' obligations of Councils and Council Tenants in the tenancy agreement.

And we look at:

- * Council Action Against the Tenant
- * Tenant Action Against the Council
- * Repairs
- * A Better Deal

COUNCIL OBLIGATIONS

Peace ...

"Covenant for Quiet Enjoyment"

This is a promise on the part of the council that the tenant has the right to enjoy possession of the premises without interference from the council. This means if the council does anything, or omits to do anything which is its responsibility, and this results in direct physical interference with the tenant's enjoyment, then the tenant can claim damages for breach of "covenant". This promise is limited in extent, however and any legal action on it will usually only be taken together with an action for repairs.

Quiet ...

"Covenant not to derogate from the grant"

This is a promise that the council won't do anything inconsistent with the tenant's enjoyment of the premises for the purposes for which they are let - usually residential. For example if the council owns adjoining property and is carrying out work there which causes noise, vibrations, etc. then it will be failing in its obligations to the tenant - though not if the interference exists at the time the tenancy is granted - such as continuing development already started. However, even if interferences don't amount to a 'breach of covenant', it might still be worth considering appealing for a reduction in rates. (See CA no.11 p.28).



and Rebates

All councils are under a statutory duty to consider the grant of a rent rebate to council tenant applicants. Entitlement is of course subject to a means test and it is for the tenant to apply. Usually if a tenant is entitled to a rent rebate then there will also be entitlement to a rates rebate.



"THAT MUST MEAN THEY'RE GOING DOWN!"

TENANTS' OBLIGATIONS

Rent

Most council tenancies are weekly although the methods and times for payment of rent varies between councils. Just what the rent includes depends on the agreement - often there are separate entries on the rent-card for rent, rates, heating charges, garage etc., but the rent payable under this obligation will usually be inclusive of all these unless the agreement states differently. If the tenant fails to pay the rent on the due date the council can straightaway take action. How soon it chooses to do so, and by what method depends on council policy. It can sue the tenant for the arrears and then recover the debt by e.g. 'distress for goods', i.e. sending in the bailiffs to seize the tenant's property, or by 'attachment of earnings order', where the tenant's employer is ordered to deduct a sum from wages to be paid into court towards the arrears.

...but NO security

However, the most usual procedure is for a notice to quit to be sent out (in Manchester last year nearly 7000 notices to quit were sent out for arrears of £50 or more). This is often only a threat but if the council decides the arrears are too great it can take on county court proceedings for possession and arrears.

If a tenant is evicted for arrears the council

has no legal responsibility to rehouse. This responsibility only applies to those made homeless through no 'fault' of their own.

Good faith - some hope!

The powers of eviction given to councils are very wide. S. 128 Housing Act 1957 frees a council from the Rent Act restrictions - in other words there is no protection for tenants by law. Also the Court of Appeal, in a case brought by Bristol City Council in 1975, said that the local authority need not provide evidence of why they want possession - but its powers must be exercised in good faith and it should have regard to its social responsibilities. The Court referred to two Government circulars on homelessness (D.O.E. 74/75 and 18/74) inviting councils to look at alternatives to eviction, though the alternatives such as 'distress' or 'attachment' can be equally condemned for not providing a real solution.

Repairs

To maintain and repair

There is an obligation for the tenant to use the premises in a "tenant like manner" e.g. not to cause the drains to be blocked. Normally the tenant will also be expected to keep the interior in reasonable decorative repair and keep the gardens in a clean and orderly condition. If the tenant fails to do this the council can usually recover the cost of doing it from the tenant.

Access

To allow the Council access

The tenant will have to allow the council access to the premises for the purpose of inspection and to do repairs - though the council should give reasonable notice to the tenant that it wants to do this.

Letting

"Not to assign, sub-let or part with possession of the property"

This means the tenant cannot transfer the tenancy or let out parts of the premises without first getting the council's permission. Some councils will allow lodgers as long as this doesn't cause overcrowding - but as a general rule permission won't be given. Most councils do however allow tenants to exchange houses within their own areas. The Greater London Council is in fact under a statutory duty to provide such facilities - but in the main a notice board in the local housing department showing what properties are available seems to be the substitute for a much needed computerized national register.

Inheriting tenancies - unlike some private tenancies council tenancies do not pass as of right to the widow or surviving children on the death of a tenant unless the tenancy was in joint names. This again applies in the case of marriage breakdown and although in most cases a transfer will be allowed there can be difficulty

for the "battered wife" whose husband has the tenancy. The council won't usually act to get the husband out as he is the lawful tenant unless the wife can get a non-molestation order from the courts and there are children involved for whom she has the right of custody.

Don'ts

"Restriction of User"

There will usually be a long list of "don'ts" which the tenant must observe e.g. not to use the premises for business purposes if residential; not to permit or cause a nuisance; not to obstruct common accessways etc. - perhaps not even to have washing or play radios etc. between certain hours - and the kids won't be allowed to play ball games!

COUNCIL ACTION

If the council take eviction proceedings for arrears, the tenant's only defence is if he/she has a claim against the council e.g. for repairs - but since no grounds are needed for eviction the court must normally grant an order. Always ask what procedures exist for discovering the reason for arrears and what help can be given to tenants in real need e.g. assistance with budgeting, claiming rent and rate rebates. Even if the court makes a "possession order" it can suspend it to



give the tenant time to pay. But eviction proceedings should always be fought - their only point seems to be punishment by compulsory transfer to cheaper accommodation on some "dump" estate or even the possible splitting up of families into temporary accommodation - methods of management condemned as indicating the failings of the system.

Final solution

If the tenant breaks any of the other obligations - then of course the council can always threaten eviction. Anyway the breaches might be serious or numerous enough to give grounds for eviction. But otherwise the council's only remedy is to sue for damages - which makes enforcement almost impossible.

REPAIRS

The question of repairs is one of major concern. What are the council's legal obligations and how can they be enforced by the tenant?

* The Actual Premises: There is an implied obligation that the council will keep the structure and exterior of the building in good repair - but S.32 Housing Act 1961 states that in respect of tenancies started after October 1961, apart from the structure and exterior (which includes all drains, gutters and external pipes), the council must also keep in repair and proper working order the installations for the supply of water, gas and electricity and sanitation (including basins, sinks, baths and sanitary conveniences) and for space and water heating.

● NB: (i) there will be no responsibility on the council if the disrepair is due to some failure on the part of the tenant to use the premises as a "responsible tenant".

(ii) the council, even if responsible, cannot be made to do the repairs until it has notice of them.



* Common Parts: What about parts of a building that the tenant has the right to use, such as stairs, lifts, passageways and rubbish chutes in high rise and multi-storey dwellings? Following a recent House of Lords case involving Liverpool City Council it has been decided that there will be an 'implied obligation' on the part of the council to keep these common parts in reasonable repair and working order - though the court did add that it was of course possible for the council to exclude this obligation by writing it into the tenancy agreement! And there will always be the question of what is 'reasonable' - if the council can show that they have taken all reasonable steps but the lifts still won't work e.g. due to persistent vandalism there will be no compensation for the innocent tenants who suffer.

TENANT ACTION

A tenant wanting to make the council live up to its repairing obligations will often need to take action through the courts if other pressure fails. Whatever happens, as soon as the disrepair comes to light, the tenant should give the council notice of it in writing and keep a copy.

Outside the courts

One possible course is for the tenant to have the work done and deduct the cost from future rent payments after first giving the council notice of this intention. This will then be a defence against any action the council takes for non-payment of rent, if it can clearly be shown the council is liable to do the repairs in the first place. However, this involves the tenant in initial expense, and only the cost of repairs can be recovered from the rent. It won't be possible to deduct an amount for compensation as this will normally have to be assessed by the courts. Damages might be recovered if it is clear what amount is involved, e.g. if there is a separate heating charge and the heating fails, withholding the heating charge would seem acceptable.

In court

★ An action for (1) damages for breach of obligation under S.32 and the covenant for quiet enjoyment plus (11) an application for an injunction or an order of "specific performance" ordering the council to do the repairs. Damages will be "specific" e.g. cost of damage to tenants' furnishings etc. and/or general i.e. for inconvenience and discomfort caused to the tenant and his or her family.

★ An action for negligence and for breach of covenant for quiet enjoyment might be another possibility. It was decided in a case against Portsmouth City Council that excessive condensation caused by a basic design fault in the heating system was the responsibility of the council and that the tenants should be compensated for any loss.

S.99

★ Summons under S.99 Public Health Act 1936. A tenant can take out a summons at the local magistrates' court by a complaint that the premises are in such a state as to be prejudicial to health - which, following recent cases, seems to mean the case will have to be supported by medical evidence such as a doctor's certificate.

Since the summons is by "complaint" this means if the council have failed to do the repair they are guilty of a criminal offence and not only can they be compelled to do the repair but the magistrates also have the power to award the tenant compensation and costs.



The first two actions will need the help of a law centre or friendly lawyer.

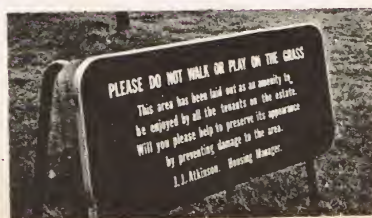
But many council tenants have now used the S.99 procedure to get repairs done and so there is a lot of practical experience and information, which other tenants associations can call on.

For example, 'How to Fight for Better Housing Conditions' - 14p to T.A.s from Community Action.

PHAS Practice Notes No 1 (see p39 for advert) or contact Public Health Advisory Service, Care House, Bigland St, London E1 (01-790-4507)

A BETTER DEAL

What is needed is a genuine agreement between council and tenant. The council's obligations need to be spelled out clearly, with an end to the petty restrictions that characterise tenancy agreements. Moreover, council tenants have a right to protection from eviction - this has been awaited for far too long.



WHO GETS HOUSED?

How Councils Decide

Decent housing is a right. But councils rehouse according to "housing need" instead.

Waiting lists and other systems used by councils to allocate houses are only necessary because there are not enough council houses to go round. The history of council housing - which we looked at in the last issue of C/A - shows why: Government policy has always been directed at slum clearance. Councils HAVE NOT had to build for the general needs of the population.

Councils are given the power to build and manage council housing, to select tenants - and evict them - under the 1957 Housing Act. But the standard of management and maintenance of council housing varies widely between councils. So does the way councils decide who to rehouse.

Here we look at:

- * the management of a typical Housing Department - and how far it is controlled politically
- * getting a council house - how councils run their 'allocation' systems

MANAGEMENT

Council housing is under both political and administrative control - though the two can overlap a great deal. Tenants seeking greater control can see what they are up against - and which parts of the system do what - repairs, lettings, rent fixing, and so on.

Political Control

Councillors on the Housing Committee decide the overall policies within which council housing is managed and let. These major decisions include:

- * building programmes
- * expenditure on community facilities
- * maintenance and repair budgets
- * staffing of the department
- * rents
- * allocation priorities.

The Housing Committee is delegated to make these decisions by the full council. The key policy decisions are often made on the basis of reports and recommendations put up by the officers.

Housing Department

The main functions of the Housing Department are:

- rent collection
- managing estates
- repairs and maintenance
- and (probably) community facilities.
- selecting tenants

Other council departments have housing responsibilities:

- * new building is planned and designed within the

Planning and Architects departments.

- * the powers and duties of the Public Health Department, on repairs and standards, include council housing.

Many councils have a "Direct Works" force to do repairs and some do new building work too. Direct works may be in the Housing Department or 'Highways and Works' or another technical department.

No one should underestimate the power of the Housing Department to recommend policies to the Housing Committee, or to carry out policies as it thinks best. "Housing Management" is a profession and has its own professional organisation, the Institute of Housing Managers, with its own ideas on management, maintenance and tenant relations. Their ideas may not be the same as yours!

GETTING A COUNCIL HOUSE

As long as there is a housing shortage, no council 'allocation' system can be fair. Some groups always lose out - single people, couples without children - because councils give priority to families, and much of their housing stock inevitably consists of a 3-bedroomed house or flat.

Discrimination exists also against one-parent families, coloured families and others. They are the inevitable victims of moral or racial prejudice and personal judgements by housing department officials, concerned to keep up "standards" on their estates.



Slum clearance in Liverpool

Clearly, the methods of allocation and their 'fairness' varies widely between councils.

In this section we look at:

- * allocation systems
- * how the waiting list works
- * improving an unfair system

HOUSING
IS A
RIGHT

'Priority' Groups

Any allocation system is a compromise. Each system is a set of 'priorities' chosen by the council. They vary according to local political decisions, local management ideas and local needs. Somewhere in the Housing Committee minutes or in the Housing Department, these priorities will be stated.

A typical priority list will be:

- 1 people in slum clearance and redevelopment areas
- 2 homeless families
- 3 people with high medical priority
- 4 families under notice to quit
- 5 transfers and exchanges
- 6 waiting list.

People on the waiting list usually form only one of the several priority groups. They are normally given the lowest priority. In areas with huge slum clearance programmes - eg. Salford, Glasgow - very few people get rehoused off the waiting list. Other areas have a huge homelessness problem, and again, few people get rehoused from the waiting list.

Some councils have so many "priority groups" (up to 19 or 20) that these take the place of the waiting list. The top priorities reflect the fact that councils are under a duty to rehouse when they create homelessness through compulsory purchase, closing orders, clearance orders and improvement notices served on landlords. The 1948 National Assistance Act also puts a duty to rehouse families made homeless in "unforeseen" circumstances. Despite these duties, local practice varies widely.

Points system

● This system is often poorly understood. Many councils do not publicise details of how this system works. So tenants are not told their "score", nor how many points they need to be rehoused, nor how long they may have to wait, "in case the tenant abuses this information". Some councils provide leaflets on request.

● Extra points can be awarded at the "discretion" of the housing department, as the council sees fit, for example, on medical grounds. This encourages the use of doctors' letters, but they are so common in some areas as to be almost meaningless.

● This system doesn't make enough allowance for bad physical conditions - damp, rats, mice, etc. The belief is that the Public Health Department should insist that repairs are made good by landlords whilst the family is on the list.



Date order

● A "first come first served" system is too crude, except in the odd area with little housing stress, because it is too easily overwhelmed by urgent and special needs.

Merit system

● Gives councillors too much power. Open to favouritism, discrimination and corruption. Still used in Wales, smaller English and Scottish authorities.

HOW THE WAITING LIST WORKS

4 Different Systems

POINTS

the most common system
Families are given "points" according to different "needs" - bedrooms needed, lack of toilet or bathroom, overcrowding, years on the list, number of kids, etc.

DATE ORDER

rehousing on a "first come first served" basis

'special cases' jump the queue

MERIT

rehousing depends on a councillor's recommendation

mainly used by smaller councils

MIXED

some authorities combine the Points and Date Order systems

GETTING ON THE LIST

Rules of Admission

Many councils operate rules which prevent groups of people from even getting on the list.

residential - this means living in the area
qualification for a certain period - usually 1 to 5 years, before you can register on the list.

employment - working locally for a certain time

income - no families with more than a certain income can register

age, family size, tenure - some councils exclude whole groups of people. In Leicestershire the different councils exclude:

- *single people under 35, except teachers, social workers, or on medical grounds
- *unfurnished tenants
- *owner-occupiers

Because waiting lists are far-longer than the number of vacancies, getting rehoused means going through several stages:

REHOUSED FROM THE LIST

- ▶ Allowed to register.
- ▶ Application form: family details, present housing, etc.
- ▶ Points scored: depending on "needs" - lacking bedrooms, WC, on medical grounds, overcrowding, etc.
- ▶ Waiting: applications are grouped by councils according to (1) size of house needed (2) points scored.
- ▶ Home visit: people high on list get Home visit, to (1) check on points awarded (2) "to make a general comment on domestic standards" (see below).
- ▶ Offer: up to 3 reasonable offers - unreasonable offers do not count (see below).
- ▶ Flat redecorated: council may redecorate, or offer a grant or a rent free week or two.
- ▶ Sign tenancy agreement, move in.

IMPROVING AN UNFAIR SYSTEM

It's wrong to categorise every council as running an unfair, inefficient system of allocation. But there are many ways to make improvements.

* Rules of admission: in 1969 a Government Circular (91/69) recommended that all restriction on registering should be abolished. Some councils have done so - but still insist on a year's wait on the list before being considered for rehousing!



Bracknell New Town

* Forms: are often complex and may not cater for "minority" needs - eg. pensioners living in too large accommodation who want rehousing to cut heating costs, rent, etc.

* Publicity: councils do not advertise the waiting list, nor how it works, nor how many points are scored.

* Home visits : are made by a housing department employee to report on the "domestic standards" of the family. They judge "cleanliness" and "respectability". Then families are graded - P poor, F fair, FG fair to good, G good. The purpose of the visit is to decide what

standard of accommodation to offer the family. The grading system is a 'moral judgement' and should be banned. Councils use it to decide who to send to their 'dump' estates. Council time would be better spent trying to rehouse the family where they want to go!

* "Dump" estates : they're created by housing departments. Estates get a bad name largely because of neglect by the council - repairs are not done, no kids playgrounds or facilities are provided, the environment is neglected. Councils then use these estates to "punish" families in arrears by moving them there. Homeless families - with one offer of rehousing to choose from - often start on a dump estate. Tenants with the normal 3 offers will turn these estates down.

* Special cases: most councils give urgent priority to special cases - families under notice to quit, people with a high number of 'medical points'. This system is open to allegations of 'queue jumping', but really it only re-emphasises the necessity for more council housing.



[Byker (Newcastle)]
Let in advance and tenants involved in the design

* Transfers and exchanges: councils allow transfers and exchanges, but for various reasons - cost is one - do not run a special exchange service notice board is offered instead. Much more could be done to help transfers between estates and over the country as a whole.

* Weeding out: people have to re-register on the list each year - or more frequently. Names may be weeded out if families do not re-register - even though they may have just given up signing. The council should not remove a name without first contacting the family concerned.

* Let in Advance : in some 'clearance areas' people can choose their flat whilst it is still on the drawing board. It gives the family a chance to plan furnishings, curtains, etc. and even to swap to be near a friend. These and other allocation systems like "Community-based Renewal", which allows people to be rehoused in the same area after clearance, help to ensure that tenants are satisfied in their new home. (For more on community-based renewal. see C/A no.16, p.5).

WHO PAYS & WHO PROFITS

Rents, Rates and Subsidies

In this section we want to examine the crucial issue of rents - where the money goes and why massive increases are on the way. This section also looks at how council houses are paid for and where the money comes from for repairs. It should provide tenants groups with information to counter the distorted and inaccurate attacks on council housing.

WHO REALLY COLLECTS YOUR RENT

Nearly two thirds of all rent money collected goes to pay interest charged by the financiers on the money they lend local authorities to build council houses. And if it weren't for subsidies from the Government and the contribution from the rates ALL the rent money collected would be insufficient to pay these interest charges - for example £2775m was collected in rents in 1973-74 but councils had to pay out £954m in interest payments. This excluded repaying the actual loan;

Although some of these interest payments are paid to the Government's Public Works Loan Board (PWL B C/A No.24 p18) it all goes to the financiers in the end because the PWLB itself borrows from the money market in the City.

What rent increases are on the way?

Within the next two years the Government plans to increase all council rents by an average of £2.50 a week at current prices. This is on top of any recent increases - most rents have gone up an average of 60-70p in the last few months, but this average hides massive increases for many tenants - up to £3 in Westminster and £4 in Liverpool.

With the average rent in England and Wales now nearly £5 a week (about £3.25 in Scotland) excluding rates, rent rebates, the extra £2.50 a week amounts to a 50% increase in 2 years - at a time when the Government is trying to limit wage increases to 3%.

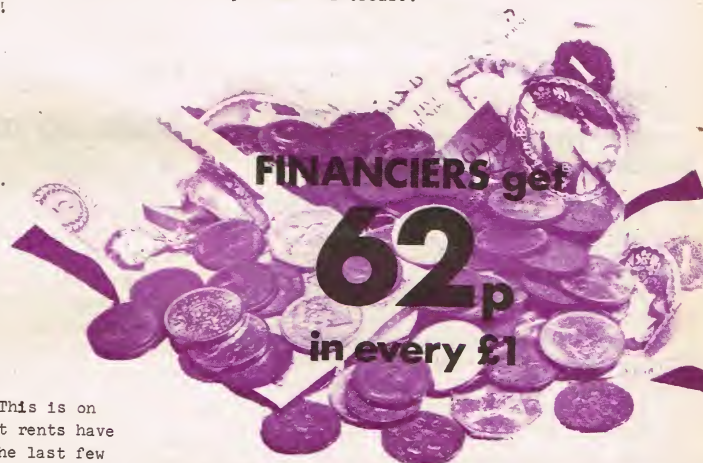
The cost of council housing is going to continue to increase over the next few years regardless of whether new council housebuilding is cutback, whether inflation is 5% or 25% this year or whether wages go up 3% or 33%. Why?

It will increase because of the high cost of

borrowing money to pay for the ever increasing cost of land and construction. When the rate of inflation increases, as it has done recently so do interest rates. This in turn causes the rate at which the loan is repayed with the interest to change so that more is repaid earlier and less later on. Consequently interest payments on council housing have soared to £1400m in 1975/76. If inflation remains steady or falls then interest payments will eventually come down.

Why will rents rise?

Subsidies from the Government have increased 233% in the last five years to help council pay these and other increased costs. However the Government in the recent white paper on Public Expenditure has decided to limit increases in subsidies to 13% a year over the next five years. But since the cost of borrowing money will increase more than this the extra will have to come from...the tenants - hence the proposed £2.50 a week increase.



WHERE YOUR RENT GOES

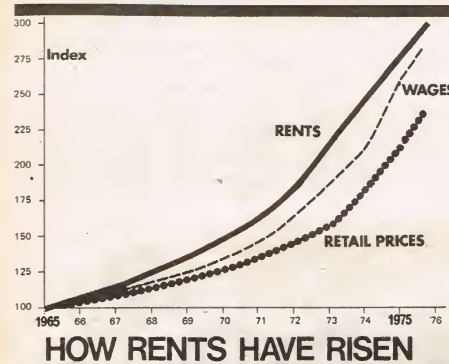
So massive rent increases are proposed by a Labour Government not to help pay for more council houses (fewer are being built now and for the next 5 years than in 1968), not to get better maintenance and management (money for repairs has been cut in the last 2 years) but to pay the financiers profits and to cut housing expenditure and divert money to private industry.

These proposed increases are not inevitable-they can be fought. The Labour Government has chosen to make council tenants pay in order to cut public expenditure and it has chosen not to do anything

about controlling the banks and financial institutions which profit out of council housing. Although each local authority now decides its own rent levels, Government control of the level of subsidy means in effect that the local authority has little choice (see also p.24)

Have rents risen faster than wages and prices?

Yes! Over the past ten years rents have always been rising faster than wages, household income (after tax) and retail prices. Even the rent freeze in 1974/5 didn't alter this situation. The chart, prepared by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, shows that rents have gone up about 180% in the past 10 years compared with increases of about 160% in wages and 110% in retail prices. So much for the Social Concrick!



Why was the rent freeze a con?

The rent freeze was of some benefit for a brief period but in reality it was only a means of delaying more rent increases - the higher the increases once the freeze was over. The cost of council housing didn't freeze or standstill - construction, repair and management costs continued to rise. The money had to come from somewhere - it came in increased subsidies from the Government. But this has only led to stronger attacks against subsidies and council housing by the Right and pressures for further cuts in public expenditure.

How are rents fixed?

Since 1935, excluding the period of the Tory Housing Finance Act 1972-75, council rents have been based on the pooled cost of building and maintaining all the council houses built by a local authority. Pooling means that each local authority combines all the land, construction, management and repair costs plus the interest charges on borrowing the money. This sum minus the amount of subsidies received from the Government and contribution from the rates, is then

" Rents should be increased drastically. A doubling would be needed for historic costs to be covered and probably a tripling in order to cover market values. "

from 'Towards Freedom in Housing'
Tory Bow Group pamphlet 1975

divided by the number of council houses a local authority owns and allowances made for the different size, condition etc. of the houses to arrive at a rent.

This means that all the widely differing costs of building council houses are shared between all the tenants. For example the rents of houses built on relatively cheap land help to keep down the rents of houses built on expensive land. Similarly the rents of houses built 40 years ago - which have paid for these houses - help to keep down the rents of new council houses.

Following the Housing Rents and Subsidies Act last year rents are again set by local authorities on the basis of pooled historic costs but most rent levels still reflect the fair rents established by the Tories (the Housing Finance Act gave control of rent fixing to Rent Scrutiny Boards and set rents based on market principles). Local authorities now have to set "reasonable rents" which are fixed after considering what proportion of costs will be met by the tenants and by the rate payers (who include tenants) (See P.24)

Why is the pooling of rents so important?

★ Sharing all the costs between all the tenants results in much more equitable rent levels than would otherwise be the case. While some tenants' rents will have paid the actual cost of their house this keeps down the rents for their families, relatives and other tenants who will live in newer council houses.

★ Rents are set on the basis of the 'cost' of the dwelling as opposed to the market value of the dwelling. Thus with council rents there is no landlord extracting profit resulting from control of the scarce resource of housing. (The cost does however include the profits extracted by the financiers and building industry).

★ Any gains in the value of land, dwellings and facilities are shared by all tenants and not extracted by individuals as in the private housing market.

HOW COUNCILS PAY FOR NEW HOUSES

Local authorities have to borrow to pay for the land and construction of new council houses. Some of the money comes from the Government's Public Works Loan Board (PWL) and the rest from the banks and other financial institutions. Local authority finance is big business - very safe, profitable

and expanding. Housing accounted for 52% of the total local authority debt of £24,500m (at March 31, 1975). Local authorities borrow from different sources as the supply and control of money varies between different institutions. For example, the banks lent about half of the money borrowed by local authorities in 1971 but three years later this had declined rapidly. More recently, building societies, flush with money, increased their investment in local authorities by £518m in the first nine months of last year.

WHO INVESTS IN LOCAL AUTHORITIES

	£
Banks	4300m
Building societies	1650m
Insurance companies & pension funds	1960m
Private companies	485m
Individuals	1100m

At end of 1974. Even more money was invested because the FWLB borrows from these same financiers and then lend to local authorities who owed the FWLB £10,000m at the end of 1974.

There have been lots of stories in the press about how the local authority housing debt increased 57% to £13,000m between 1970-75. But the same stories always forget to mention that the amount of money owed by owner occupiers on their mortgages to building societies increased by 107% to £16,000m in the same period.

There has also been much talk about local authorities borrowing money intended for industry. The fact is that owner occupation is now taking well over a third of all the money available for investment (excluding only the banks) and this will go on increasing as bigger and bigger mortgages are needed as house prices rise. In contrast a local authority has only to pay off the original cost of the house - though costs will go up when interest rates rise.

The money does not come from the small saver as local authorities are forbidden to accept their deposits. Instead they are channelled into building societies, who, like the banks, lend their surplus money to local authorities at market rates of interest. Profits gained from this then help to keep interest rates for owner occupiers below those which local authorities are charged.

How money is raised

The housing department doesn't raise the loans for new council houses itself - they are raised through the local authority's own Consolidated Loans Fund together with loans for all major projects. The loans are pooled in the same way as rents (see p 22).

About 1/3 of all loans are obtained through the FWLB and the rest directly from the City through brokers (private companies in the City who deal with banks and financiers to raise loans - and take a cut) or through the loans bureau of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.

Although new council houses are financed over 60 years the local authority doesn't usually borrow the money for this length of time. Loans are taken out for much shorter periods - two thirds are now for less than 5 years - which means that money has to be borrowed several times before the houses are finally paid for. Loans can be on a temporary basis - overnight or periods up to one year - or on a long term basis.

Interest rates are fixed in the City - they've doubled in the last ten years. When interest rates are high local authorities are forced to borrow more and more on a temporary or short term basis in the hope that interest rates will fall and so reduce interest payments. More loans means more profit for the brokers and financiers.

More money-fewer council houses

Public spending on housing has increased 77% in the last three years and also increased its share of all public expenditure. But -

* fewer council houses are being built because less money, after allowing for inflation, is being spent - down from £1982 in 1968-9 to £1333m in 74-5.

* in the same period public spending on private housing increased from 9% to 21% (ie mortgages, improvement grants to owner occupiers and landlords, etc). And the share of public money to housing associations increased from under 1% to over 5%.

* over the next four years the level of new council housing building will remain roughly static, while public spending on private housing will continue at this year's level, and the proportion going to housing associations will double!



£100 a week council houses!

There have been many hysterical articles in the press recently about council houses costing £100 a week, massive subsidies to tenants, and so on. All these articles ignore certain basic facts:

* Council rents are pooled - all the costs are shared by all the tenants (see p22). So to use only examples of the cost of new council houses to arrive at the level of rents, subsidies, etc, is a gross distortion. It seems that a simple socialist principle cannot be understood by the capitalists who write and control the press.

* In times of high inflation, interest rates rise which results in changes in the timing of the repayment of loans and the interest. More is repaid earlier and less later (see p21). The opponents of

council housing always base their figures on the first year only and so create a totally false picture.

*The examples used are always London ones. Camden is a favourite, where land and construction costs are higher than in other parts of the country.

*The profits made out of council housing by the land owners, builders and financiers are never mentioned, let alone is the system which encourages this exploitation questioned.

RUNNING COSTS

Each council runs what is called a Housing Revenue Account(HRA)into which rent money and other income is paid. Interest payments, the cost of repairs, etc. are paid out of this account. The sources of income and how the money is spent are explained below.

every £100 of INCOME comes from:		every £100 of EXPENDITURE goes on:	
Unrebated rents	£ 55	Interest payments	£ 62
Subsidies	35	Repaying loans	8
Contribution from the rates	7	Repairs	17
Other	4	Management	10
	£100	Other	3
			£100

This is based on an average of all local authorities' HRAs in England and Wales in 1975-6. The various proportions of income and expenditure vary widely from council to council.

The most important thing about these figures is that council tenants make a contribution to every type of income into the HRA - they pay rent, rates and taxes.

What the HRA covers

Almost all council housing income and expenditure goes through the HRA. As well as new building and maintenance the HRA covers improvement of council houses, buying houses from landlords and owner occupiers, buying new private developments from builders, and the sale of council houses. Improvement grants and mortgages are handled separately.

Rents

In 1968 rents represented on average 73% of HRA income(England and Wales only)and it is only recently that this has declined to 55%. Yet one rarely hears that the proportion which owner occupiers actually pay of their mortgage repayments has gone down from 74% to 63% in the same period - the rest is paid through tax relief.

Subsidies

Subsidies from the Government to the HRA have increased 233% in the last 5 years - this has been well publicised in the press. A fact not so well publicised is the 300% increase in subsidies to owner occupiers in the same period!

There are now four different kinds of subsidies following the Housing Rents and Subsidies Act last year.

- 1 the local authority receives the same amount of subsidy which they received during 1974/5 under the Tory Housing Finance Act plus
- 2 66% of the cost to the Housing Revenue Account of buying land for housing, constructing and improving houses and buying existing houses.
- 3 33% of any costs caused by increases in interest rates on money borrowed prior to March 31, 1975.
- 4 a special subsidy to councils who, through no fault of their own, have higher than average costs per house.

Rates

The contribution from the rates to the HRA has varied between 3% and 8% in the last 8 years. This is the scale of the "massive rate subsidy to tenants" that ratepayers groups go on about - and they forget the council tenants also pay rates. In Scotland it has traditionally been higher - 35% 15 years ago but now about 15%.

Improvement money

The Government controls the amount of money councils can spend on improving council houses through Section 105 of the 1974 Housing Act. Each year the Government gives local authorities an allocation. This is not a grant but a limit on the amount of money the local authority can borrow to pay for improvement work. All the money passes through the HRA.

Tenants always lose out

There are 3 key ways the Government keeps tabs on local authorities' housing expenditure. It controls the amount they can borrow, decides the level of subsidies they get and it won't allow them to make a loss on the HRA - any 'overspending' has to be made up from the rates. Within these limits councils can decide how they are going to run their own HRAs - how much land they're going to buy, how many houses to build and improve, how well they'll maintain their estates, and so on.

Whenever interest charges and other costs go up the council has to juggle with the amount of money coming in and going out of the HRA. On the income side, since subsidies are fixed, only rents can be increased and/or the contribution from the rates increased - tenants pay either way. On the spending side the financiers always get their money which leaves only the possibility of savings on management and repairs. Savings in the former can only be made by sacking staff and cutting back on services - difficult to implement on any scale and tenants would bear the brunt of the effects. This leaves only maintenance and repairs which can be cut back - or responsibility passed on to the tenant. Or a combination of all of these

EQUITY SHARING

- a new attack

Equity sharing is a new form of tenure - half way between council housing and owner occupation. It's worth looking at because it is a new type of attack on council housing, and also illustrates the key financial advantages of council housing.

Likely to become increasingly popular among councils equity sharing raises key questions about the future of working class housing. Is council housing going to expand and provide for the full range of housing need? Or will it be forced into retreat and end up providing bad housing for the elderly and infirm?

What is equity sharing?

Equity sharing means that the occupier rents part of the house from the council and owns the rest (or more accurately, pays mortgage on the rest). So, for example, a two-bedroomed house costing £14,000 to build could be half rented and half owned (though it could be any share - say 25% owned, 75% rented). The occupier would pay half an ordinary council rent (say £3.50) and repayments on a mortgage of £7000 (around £11), a total of £14.50 a week. On top of that there would be rates and repair and maintenance costs. When the occupier moves the Council buys back the share that's been paid for and sells to a new occupier. This is done at market price - so the new occupier has to pay for any capital gain. But the government also has to pay out since the first occupier will get full tax relief on a new mortgage.



Who's backing it?

The first scheme on these lines was set up in Birmingham at the end of 1975. This year the GLC have established a similar experiment in Cheshunt, Herts. The recently published strategy for East London's Docklands suggested that some 10,000 of the 23,000 new homes should be equity shared. In a Commons statement in March, Reg Freeson, Minister of Housing gave his blessing to this new approach. Not surprisingly, there's also big support from the Building Societies and financial institutions.

There are two main reasons for this growing support:

- * the public subsidies to equity shared housing are lower than to council housing in the first few years (they become much more in later years as we show below)

- * the government wants to push the demand for new housing as far as possible into owner occupation, rather than into an expanded council sector.

Why is it a threat?

Equity sharing is a step towards owner occupation. Its effect is to sell off council housing piece by piece so that the benefits go to individual owners. Council housing in contrast is owned by the community and the costs and benefits are spread between older and newer property and between larger and smaller homes. This means a fairly equal share of rents are borne by each tenant as rents and costs are pooled (see p22).

With owner occupation there is no sharing out of costs and benefits, so that some individuals benefit unduly, others lose. Long-time owners, for example, can make big gains when house prices rise quickly. New buyers on the other hand have to pay very heavily.

Subsidies for private profit

So the first objection to equity sharing is that it threatens the basis of council housing provision by turning social gain into private profit. And this means high public subsidies in the end. Although equity sharers have to pay more at first (a major reason for Government support since the initial subsidy is less) eventually the Government has to make big pay-outs as equity sharers move out and take their capital gains.

Queue jumping

The second objection to equity sharing is that the housing won't go to those in need. In principle council housing can be allocated to those with the greatest housing need (though as the section on allocation shows there are defects in the way it actually works). But private housing is allocated according to income - the more you earn the more you can buy.

Housing for need

In East London less than one family in ten could afford to equity share. Because housing will go to the better off (in an area where each Borough has around 7000 on its waiting lists) equity sharing will be a way of achieving "social balance" or gentrifying the docklands.

The third objection to equity sharing is that it will create further divisions between different council estates. Since only richer tenants will be able to afford equity shared housing the older property will be increasingly reserved for poorer tenants.

Equity sharing then is the latest attempt to siphon off housing resources for the better off, reduce short term public subsidy and attack the principle of social ownership. It must be opposed.

TENANT CONTROL



CONTROL OVER WHAT?

Do you want control over your own home? Do you want to work through the tenants association to control your rent levels and who gets houses on your estate? Are you willing to do the organising and administration to enable these things to happen?

Greater control by council tenants over their homes, and the way they are built and managed, is an essential part of the struggle for decent housing. For decades, council tenants groups have been fighting for greater freedom to run council housing.

But what is meant by 'control' - and control of 'what'? Increased tenant control does not imply that more finance and other resources will be made available to improve the amount and quality of council housing. In fact, the reverse appears to be true - the recent enthusiasm for tenant control by the Government and some councils seems to be based on the principle of off-loading expensive and time-consuming duties like repairs and maintenance on to tenants.

Furthermore, the present policy of encouraging "tenants coops" not only evades the issue of tenant control of council housing in a wider sense. It is also part of the attack on council housing, along with other initiatives - equity-sharing and increased owner occupation.

Tenant control, in the form of tenant cooperatives, management committees, etc, cannot in itself solve the problems now facing council housing. On the contrary, tenant control is being used to draw attention away from the failure of successive governments, and the economic system, to provide decent housing for all at a price people can afford.

Control over the home

Every householder should have the right to decide on the internal and external decoration, repair, maintenance and improvement of his or her home. Owner-occupiers and some private tenants have it, but this basic freedom is denied to virtually every

council tenant.

Obviously major and structural repairs must be the responsibility of the council. In addition, many tenants will not want or be able to do their own maintenance. And there will still be a need for an effective council direct works department irrespective of whether repairs are organised by tenants or the council.

Who will pay? More control over the home must not be a means for the council to off-load costs onto tenants. The money available for repairs through the HRA (see p 24) must still be spent either by the council or tenants' organisation set up to manage their estates. In fact tenants must still campaign on a city wide level to make sure that adequate money is made available and is not cut back as it has been recently

Control over the estates

There is no reason why decisions over the management and maintenance of estates should not be the responsibility of tenants, if they wish this to happen.

Tenants will always know better than the housing manager when it comes to making decisions about their estate - where should a new playground be sited, where can cars be parked, what standard should flats be improved to, what should the caretaker do, etc.

Control over wider policies

Some issues affect more than just individual dwellings or estates, and have an effect on all council tenants in any local authority area. Issues like housing allocation and rents come into this category. Greater control over these issues means that tenants must take a wider view of housing need in the area.

Allocations

Many tenants associations are fighting for a say in the allocations for their estate, to ensure that children and relatives can live near their families. But it is essential that overall control of allocations is carried out in the light of housing needs over the whole local authority area. Councils are responsible for rehousing from redevelopment areas, for homeless families, health cases, etc, all of which are housing needs to be dealt with on a city or borough-wide basis, rather than on an estate basis.

Rents

Everyone would no doubt like to set their own rent - and the lower it is the better! However rents are set on the basis of rent pooling (see p22), which means that all the costs are shared by all the tenants - rents of older houses help to keep down the rents of newer ones.

So if each estate set its own rents then the whole idea of rent pooling would be destroyed. Rent pooling is a vitally important aspect of council housing and one of its key advantages.

This does not mean to say that tenants shouldn't be involved in policy issues like rents, campaigning for increased government subsidies, and allocations. It is up to tenants to increase their own political power through organising and taking action to make sure that decisions made by councillors are in the best interests of tenants. Both councils and tenants groups and federations must recognise that tenants have a right to be involved in these crucial policy issues.

HOW CAN TENANTS GET CONTROL?

Control by tenants implies two things:

- * tenants organising and carrying out their decisions themselves - to an extent doing the council's job for them;
- * having power to influence or instruct others to carry out their decisions and demands.

The way of establishing control will depend on the political situation in each area. Tenants groups may be in total conflict with their council who may have previously tried to coopt them through other schemes. Consequently groups will be very suspicious of councils coming forward with the idea of tenants coops etc. In other areas tenants may feel that the council is doing a relatively good job, and while wanting more control over their own homes, don't want to take on a lot more responsibility and work themselves. Other groups may feel that the only way ahead is to make sure that they do the work themselves, and set up a co-op to do this. Whatever tactics are used to gain more control one crucial point must be made. The government and local authorities are pushing tenant co-ops. This form of control means that tenants or tenants associations have to be prepared to put in an enormous

amount of time and effort to get what they want. Often this may be out of all proportion to the real gains.

The principles of tenant control and the different ways to achieve it are not being discussed by the Government or local authorities. They are only pushing one type of organisation, which may or may not result in more control, but it will save councils money!

The point is that in the housing system, the scales are loaded against the tenant. Although the balance can be shifted a little, it requires an enormous amount of effort on the part of tenants to achieve it. This will continue to be the case until such time as our political and economic system is radically changed - not only in housing, but in education, jobs and all other aspects of life.

Those in power realise that this situation exists, and for them it is obviously preferable for tenants to spend their time and energy in achieving small-scale reforms, rather than fighting to change the system which has created these enormous social imbalances.

Tenants co-operatives

Tenants co-ops are riding on the crest of the wave as the new 'saviour' to our housing problems. Of course they can never be that, but while there are enormous drawbacks to co-ops, there may be ways of turning them to the advantage of tenants and council housing generally.

The government's policy towards co-ops is based upon two documents, the Campbell Report (published by HMSO, price £2) which is the final report of the government's working party on housing co-ops, and government circular 8/76 which gives advice to local authorities.



Within council housing the government see two types of possible housing co-op: MANAGEMENT CO-OPS, where tenants do not own the property - it remains in the hands of the council, but where they have collective responsibility for some or all of the management; and NON-EQUITY CO-OPS, where tenants collectively own or lease the property. Usually this means a long-term lease from the local authority. Each member has a stake limited to one share, usually a nominal £1, which is repayable without interest on leaving. (Not to be confused with Equity-sharing, see p25.)

Half-way house

The Campbell Report prefers non-equity co-ops. It argues that management co-ops are only a "half-way house" to non-equity co-ops. But the real danger is that non-equity is more than half way to owner-occupation and attacking the very existence of council housing.

- Non-equity co-ops will normally have total control over allocations. The local authority will be faced with housing people in a reduced housing stock as more non-equity co-ops are established.

- Moreover as older blocks move into non-equity co-op ownership, the rents of houses remaining in council ownership will go up because the system of rent pooling will be drastically altered (see p22).

From the tenants point of view, a non-equity co-op will mean almost total control over the home. But this will also involve taking on financial responsibility for repairs and maintenance, which could be crippling.

In Management Co-ops, the property remains in public ownership, but responsibility for management rests with the co-op. Housing allocations may continue to be carried out by the council, either with the agreement of the co-op or with the co-op holding a proportion of allocations.

Why a co-op anyway?

Management co-ops are far more acceptable than non-equity co-ops, but management co-ops are still only a way of handing over control of management to tenants on an estate. So why is the establishment of a "co-op" necessary? Why not give tenants full security and rights over their homes, then discuss how each association wants to run its estate?

Management schemes

Another variant of the management co-op idea are management schemes which some councils have adopted, eg Southwark, Camden, Newcastle. These usually involve tenants and councillors on a committee responsible for housing management, often covering all or part of a local authority area.

Most of these committees are purely consultative, with little real power. (see C/A 7, p 33). Councillors on these committees often complain that tenants are only concerned with minor issues such as the colour of their front doors. Yet these are real

grievances. Once these basic issues can be dealt with then tenants can and do take up wider issues.

Many tenants groups and federations have constantly been concerned with policy issues. The key question is whether changes in policies which affect all tenants can best be achieved through negotiation within a committee of councillors and officers or more effectively through remaining independent of council committees and taking whatever political action is necessary. Obviously both can be tried but both require strong and well organised tenants groups and federations.



THE STRUGGLE AHEAD

If council housing is to be what it should be - good quality housing available to all at a price people can afford - then greater tenant control is essential.

However, control on its own won't redress any of the major imbalances which exist in housing as a whole, and which in terms of tenants rights mean that council housing is the poor relation of owner-occupation. The only way that this will be changed is through united action on a wide political front.

Furthermore, there are real dangers in the way in which the government and local authorities are pushing their brand of tenant control.

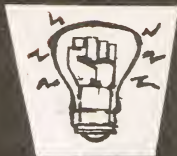
Tenants co-ops - especially non-equity co-ops - are a threat to council housing.

- they push the cost of repairs on to tenants who can ill afford it
- they reduce the stock of council housing - so increasing the time on the waiting list
- they undermine the "rent pooling" system
- they direct council resources away from less well organised estates into setting up co-ops!

Non-equity co-ops, seen beside the government's push for more owner-occupation, equity-sharing and the cuts in public housing expenditure amounts to an unprecedented attack on council housing.

There must be more tenant control of housing - but only on the tenants' terms.

HEATING CAMPAIGNS



Final notices of the largest fuel bills ever received are now being sent out by the Fuel boards. While most newspapers have lost interest in individual 'sob stories' about increased gas and electricity charges, the problems are getting worse. Campaigns are growing against the inhuman debt and disconnection policies of the DHSS and fuel boards.

DISCONNECTIONS UP BY OVER 15%

ELECTRICITY : 138,400 households disconnected in England and Wales (Mar 75 - Mar 76)
GAS : 41,200 households disconnected in Britain (1975)

What is the government doing about this? So far, virtually nothing. In February Tony Benn asked the fuel boards to stop disconnecting households where all members are pensioners - until June. He admitted this would affect very few people. He set up an inquiry into methods of payment and collection - but had already rejected any changes in the fuel tariff system which could effectively cut costs for low income families.

Labour's Tory policy remains: the fuel industry is to run on a commercial basis!

Union Activity

We have had great difficulty finding out what action, if any, the gas and electricity unions have taken. Nationally, the Joint Staff Consultative Committees are holding negotiations with the fuel boards, but this should be backed up from branch level. Electricity workers in Cardiff and Edin-

burgh have passed resolutions opposing any disconnections. Mole Express (Manchester's alternative paper) has revealed that the NORWEB inspectors' bonus system is based on the number of "effective" visits - ie the number of homes cut off! There can be no radical solution to the problem while trade unionists have to disconnect other worker's fuel supplies to get a decent wage.

Fuel industry workers and consumers must unite in opposing:

- ◆ withdrawal of subsidies to the industry
- ◆ deals with private industry to provide cheaper fuel at the expense of the domestic consumer (see C/A23, p.24)

Secret Circular

People in danger of disconnection because they can't meet their fuel debts are not in urgent need, according to a

Demonstrators from the Right to Fuel campaign in Manchester.



secret circular from the Supplementary Benefits Commission. This is revealed by Merseyside Child Poverty Action Group. DHSS officers will ignore their legal power to give help with fuel bills to low wage earners who are not entitled to Supplementary Benefit (SB). Instead, they will refer them to council Social Services Departments - who will have nothing to give them because of the spending cuts.

Lump Sum Payment

The same circular confidentially advises DHSS officials to consider giving people who are on SB an Exceptional Needs Payment (ENP) - ie lump sum - before resorting to deducting 'fuel' money from their weekly benefit. CPAG urges anyone refused an ENP to appeal (See C/A 17, p.33 for appeal procedure).

Pool the Costs

Meanwhile Brent Claimant's Union's campaign on the Church End Estate for assistance with fuel bills had found that in nearly every case the DHSS refuses to give an ENP. With the local Law Centre, the Union is also surveying the heating systems available to councils, and has contacted the Tenants Federation to press the Council jointly for borough-wide pooled heating costs - as accepted by other authorities. This would mean a fixed charge for all, which could not be disputed by the DHSS, and would enable the Council to include heating charges for rent rebate purposes.

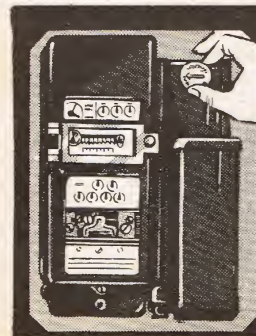
The Heating Campaign has produced a Fuel Debt Guide including step-by-step instructions for calculating realistic fuel additions.

Brent CU, 25 High St, Harlesden, London NW10 (01-965-2590)

Right to Fuel

During the Right to Fuel Campaign's Week of Action, 26 April to 1 May, fuel action groups in Newcastle, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, London and other major cities have been active on the streets in the campaign to end disconnections, end deposits, and demand fairer tariffs and methods of payment. 'Right to Fuel' workers met the Electricity Council on 26 April and were told that disconnections were essential for the Board as other means of debt repayment were too expensive and too slow. Disconnectors had been asked not to disconnect "hardship cases" ... though they didn't explain which cases caused no hardship, nor how their electricians were expected to act as social workers and make on-the-spot decisions about where hardship would result from disconnection. About 60 MPs have expressed interest in the campaign, and will be meeting on 4 May, when Moss Evans, Industrial Organiser of the T&GWU will speak.

British Association of Settlements, 7 Exton St, London SE1 (01-261-1919)



Action at Hunslet

The Hunslet Grange Heating Action Group followed up its protest over high heating costs with a campaign to get the flats repaired and improved. The high cost of heating, the dampness and draughts, were all tied in with poor construction, lack of repairs, and the inefficient central heating system.

We drew up a campaign which recognised these linkages. We organised a 'guided tour' of some flats for officials from the Council and Yorkshire Electricity Board (YEB). A report is now being prepared by council officers for the Housing Committee. We have repeatedly asked to be involved in the preparation of the report, but have been ignored



Huge Bills

Progress has been made on payments. The March bills were as high as we feared. The YEB accepted that Hunslet Grange is difficult to heat, and have agreed to a weekly collection. In cases of "hardship" (defined by them) the March bill can be paid off in weekly instalments over the next 2 quarters. To these payments will be added an estimate of the weekly bill for the 2 quarters, to arrive at the total weekly payment.

People will be able to join the fortnightly collection system which operates on the estate (previously people in debt had not been allowed to use this scheme!). This 'concession' only applies to Hunslet Grange at present. We are telling other groups, so they can get it started on their estates.

Hunslet Grange Heating Action Group, c/o 16 Asken Chase, Leeds 10.

Squatters Campaign

The Squatters Action Council, Release and the Advisory Service for Squatters have set up a working group to plan a squatters fuel campaign, as harassment of squatters through cut-offs and refusals to connect is on the increase. For instance, in a case in Farnham, some student squatters having paid a deposit and the electricity bill, were disconnected as soon as the Board realised they were squatting, without a Court entry warrant or any notice of disconnection.

End Discrimination

The initial aim of the campaign is to get a directive from the DoE banning discrimination against squatters by the fuel boards. Resolutions supporting the right of all people to electricity and gas supplies have come in to the campaign from trade union branches, trades councils, and others, and support from community groups is also needed.

The Squatters Fuel Campaign are presenting evidence to another working group set up by the Department of Energy, to examine the laws relating to the supply of electricity and gas. They suggest that others follow their example. The working group has no pressure groups or independent consumer bodies represented.

Squatters Fuel Campaign, c/o Release, 1 Elgin Ave, London W9.

SEE C.A. Issues

16, 17 & 23

for more information on gas & electricity rights, heating campaigns, help with fuel bills, and much more.

FIGHTING FOR ZEBRAS

a report on 2 local action groups who successfully campaigned for pedestrian crossings .

Since the last time we discussed the problem of how community groups could get a pedestrian crossing (in C/A no 10 p 38), the Department of the Environment has produced a new guidance for councils on when and where to provide crossings. These new instructions make it much easier for tenants and residents to prove that a crossing should be provided, as this article from tenants on two estates in S.E. London shows.

Less rigid rules

Before the new Circular(DoE 19/74) on pedestrian crossings was published in May 1974, groups fighting for a crossing had to prove to the council that the right number of cars and pedestrians used the road. This has to meet the rigid criteria, or standards, laid down by the DoE. The number of road accidents on dangerous roads didn't seem to count. The new circular has changed this situation in the following ways:

1. The circular states that "there are some situations in which the numerical criteria should be applied flexibly", and gives the following examples of local situations in which the council should be more flexible in deciding whether to provide a zebra or 'pelican' crossing:

- * where a community is divided by a busy main road.
- * where shopping areas mean that people have to cross a road.
- * where the elderly or infirm have to cross.
- * where children have to cross to go to school.
- * where there are seasonal variations in the amount of traffic.
- * where there is a high proportion of heavy vehicles using the road.

2. The record of accidents is still to serve only as a 'useful guide' to councils, not as a criterion for deciding for or against a crossing.

3. The rigid criteria relating to the number of cars and pedestrians have been relaxed(see circular for details).



TENANTS CAMPAIGNS

Over the last 18 months in Lewisham(S.E. London) three crossings have been won by tenants on roads which did not meet the standards relating to the number of cars and pedestrians but which did satisfy the new, more flexible arguments for a crossing listed above.

Crossfield Estate, Deptford

Lewisham Council had decided to widen Deptford Church Street, the road dividing the Crossfield Estate from the local shops, schools, pubs, etc. and to turn it into a dual carriageway, suitable for high speed driving. The only means of crossing the road was to be by a footbridge.

In July 1974 a Road Action Group was set up by the Tenants Association specifically to tackle this issue. It was decided that a footbridge would cost too much, arrive too late and not meet local needs(for example, pensioners would not be able to use a footbridge). The Action Group decided to campaign for 2 zebra crossings to slow traffic down and provide a convenient way of getting across the road. The campaign was started by a small group putting a barricade across the road to stop motorists. The motorist could continue after discussing the situation and signing a petition. At the same time this action on a Saturday morning, taken at the point where most of the estate would cross the road to do Saturday shopping in a local market served to help gauge the extent of agree-

ment on the need for crossings and mobilise support for future action.

Councillors challenged

The second stage in the campaign was to invite the chairman of the Lewisham Highways Committee and a local ward councillor to come down on a Saturday morning to meet tenants on the street at the point where one of the crossings was badly needed. The estate was leafleted and about 100 people made it clear why a crossing was needed and when. At the same time the councillors could actually see that the road was being used illegally (motorists were already using the road without a proper top surface) and that it was already dangerous even in its unfinished state. The chairman said that his committee would press the Greater London Council (who have the final say over major roads in London) for two Zebra crossings and that the footbridge would be scrapped.

Circular enables "special case"

The following Saturday a bigger demonstration was held and this time it was the turn of the chairman of the GLC committee that decided on crossings (the South Area Board) and the GLC ward councillor to hear the case. The chairman agreed on the need for crossings and suggested that a 'special case' could be made in order to get them. After the meeting (with members of the Action Group promising to keep people informed) the Road Action Group took the chairman of the GLC Area Board the length of the road explaining all the problems and providing him with diagrams showing where the crossings should be sited. During this it became clear that the reason he was able to make a special case was the new circular. This gave the council the opportunity to treat the numerical criteria with flexibility. The first four examples from the circular showing where flexibility should be used, all applied at Crossfields.



Keeping track

Close links were maintained between the Action Group and the Tenants Association. This helped tenants to keep track of the stages the crossings

had to go through before they were actually installed. One person was delegated to keep in touch with the GLC to do this. The Association was sent a copy of the GLC officers' report which didn't object to the crossings and the police were relatively indifferent. Three months after the campaign started the crossings were installed.

Honor Oak Estate, Brockley

Tenants on this very large old estate of 1,000 flats had tried many times over a number of years to get a crossing provided on a busy and dangerous road running through the estate. They had organised petitions, held meetings and a group of parents of children who had to cross the road to school had blocked the road several times. The last time was when the children were leaving school in the afternoon. This event received a lot of press coverage and one driver was arrested.

Presenting the case

Although it was hard for some to see why a new attempt to get a crossing should be any more successful than the others, in August 1974 the Residents Association and other local people decided to try again. The first step came when it was learnt that the matter of a crossing for the Honor Oak Estate was to be discussed by the Lewisham Highways Committee in November. At the same time on the estate there had been another accident and a petition was being organised on the issue of safety from the roads on the estate generally. A public meeting was organised so that a petition could be handed in and so that the Chairman of the Highways Committee and a ward councillor could hear the arguments and see how people felt about the road. The chairman said he understood how people felt but there had been numerous traffic counts in the past which had never established anything like the right number of pedestrians and vehicles to warrant a crossing. A copy of Circular 19/74 was then produced and the section on flexibility pointed out. It seemed as if this was news to the chairman and he concluded by saying his committee would support the application for a crossing and press the case with the GLC. The fact that people had been very angry and that attempts had been made in the past to block the road did not go un-noticed. When presenting the matter to his committee he summed up by saying that in his view if a crossing wasn't provided "the residents will take action which we may consider undesirable".

Officers fight back

A letter had also been sent prior to this confrontation with the Highways Committee chairman by the Residents Association, the estate youth club and the pensioners club giving the past history of the road and showing that the first four examples given in the circular on the "use

of flexibility" all applied at Honor Oak. The letter was sent to the Borough Engineer, whose view was that 'flexibility' and the examples provided in the Circular should not apply to areas like the Honor Oak Estate but to large shopping centres. Basically he didn't think there should be a crossing.

The next step after getting news of the Lewisham committee meeting out to every body was to get the chairman of the GLC South Area Board along this time to a small meeting to explain the case

for a crossing in detail. People were anxious to get the full story across and were afraid that a public meeting would become too disorganised and the full case would not be put. This happened in late February and having listened to the case the councillor agreed to try and get his committee to consider a crossing on the grounds that the local situation fulfilled the examples given in the circular, even though the actual 'numerical criteria' - amount of traffic and pedestrians - were not met.

Delaying tactics

However, further delay and confusion was caused when Lewisham Council carried out a traffic study in the area. The council engineers' own figures showed that the amount of traffic on the road wouldn't alter however the traffic problems were tackled. The original case for a crossing had nothing to do with the amount of traffic - the road itself was dangerous and a very large number of vulnerable people had to cross it every day. And yet some councillors still suggested that the crossing would not be needed because the traffic could be reduced in other ways!

Finally at the public meeting arranged by the council as a climax to their 'participation exercise', a local councillor was asked to assure tenants that a crossing was to be provided. In the light of the engineers' figures and the original case for a crossing, he had no choice but to do so.

Victory - at last!

All that remained was to make sure that the issue of the crossing did in fact get discussed by the GLC's South Area Board. Although the chairman of the Board had assured the residents that they would get a crossing, this was not enough. The GLC's own traffic engineers has also prepared a report for the Board saying that a crossing was the wrong answer. When the residents received a copy of this report, they sent to each member of the Board a reply to the points made by the GLC engineers, together with supporting letters from



the local school. The Board did in fact note these counter arguments and passed the request for a crossing.

Again this illustrates the need to keep after the Council even after they have agreed to provide a crossing. This particular action took longer to complete (crossing was laid in November 1975) but is a clear case where a crossing was provided without the numerical criteria being met.

WHAT WE LEARNT:

- 1 The second campaign took a lot longer and involved a lot more meetings for people to turn out to. Some people feel that this delay was a deliberate attempt to 'wear people down'. At any rate a short sharp campaign will carry more people with it and has greater political potential.
- 2 In both cases the real threat of direct action (ie physically blocking the road) was crucial.
- 3 Both campaigns first got the local authority chairman of the highways committee and ward councillor along. This was followed up in both cases by inviting the GLC counterparts. Thus it is crucial to isolate the key people in the decision-making process and find ways of convincing them to do what you want them to.
- 4 Finally the circular puts a lot more control into local people's hands by providing for flexibility. Basically if the local community recognises the politics involved (ie, 1,2,3 above) then the instructions from the DoE are in their favour and much more real local control is possible.

JIM COWAN

Contact: Cliff Pearce, 11 Barlings House, Honor Oak, London S.E.4.

How to get the Circular

"Pedestrian Crossings - Revised Criteria"

DoE Circular 19/74. Welsh Office Circular 91/74
The circular cannot be bought by the general public, but you could either ask your council if you can see a copy - they don't have to show it all to you, or you could send 50p to cover costs, to Community Action and we'll send you a photocopy.



Federation Fights for Code of Clearance

Burnley, an industrial town in North East Lancashire, is currently faced with a large Housing Clearance Programme affecting approximately 1055 properties during the next 5 years. Until recently, the Council operated a 'Black Area' policy whereby full improvement grants were refused to all those properties within the areas, numbering approximately 2000 houses, as a result of which nearly half are now in the current Clearance Programme. Apart from this Clearance Programme, a great deal of action will be required over the next 5-10 years to improve living conditions and relieve housing stress. The percentage of households lacking the standard amenities is very much higher than the national average. It is estimated that 37% of the total housing stock in Burnley - or 14,430 dwellings - require treatment of some sort to bring them up to acceptable modern-day standards.

The Action Groups in Burnley have individually sought to play a constructive role with

the Council over the proposals affecting their areas. The Federation of Local Action Groups (FLAG), formed in September 1974, exists to enable collective action to be taken when common problems among the groups can be brought to the attention of the Council in a co-ordinated manner. The most recent example of this joint action is the CODE OF CLEARANCE, a report to the Burnley Borough Council Planning Committee.

Code of Clearance

FLAG lists 4 main deficiencies in the existing procedure; these are:

1. inadequate information
2. blight and deteriorating conditions
3. destruction of communities
4. wastage.

They propose a 'Code of Clearance' and recommend that:

* A booklet should be prepared explaining the procedure of CPOs, compensation and rehousing, which should be sent to all residents of Clearance Areas.

* When requested by residents, public meetings should be held between Councillors, officers and residents.

* An advice service should come into operation.

* Residents should be able to obtain copies of CPO maps etc.

* Vacated properties should be bricked up as soon as possible.

* Street lighting should be maintained in Clearance Areas.

* Pavements should be kept up to reasonable standards.

* Residents in Clearance Areas should be rehoused in the same area after clearance and re-development.

The Appendix gives examples of official letters sent out by the Council and which FLAG feels are almost incomprehensible jargon and cause great distress to residents.

This then is the report, the 'Code of Clearance' which was submitted to the Planning Committee in July 1975.

Council reaction

The report itself was received with mixed feelings. Some Coun-

cillors welcomed it, some dismissed it. The Council accepted the Chief Executive Officer's advice on the report which, although it "welcomed the constructive thinking behind the report", at the same time stated that "most of the ... items already constitute the Council's administrative practice". It was said that FLAG's document raised no issues other than those that had been discussed on more than one occasion by both Members and Officers.

Advice & involvement

The Chief Executive pointed out two main areas of disagreement: 'advice' and 'public involvement'. FLAG had defined 'advice' as informing a resident about fighting a CPO and what his rights are, and that this advice should be available not just during working hours. The Chief Executive said that advising in this way was completely outside the Council's role.

As for 'public involvement', FLAG drew attention to DoE Circular 13/75, para 20 which recommended that residents be involved in drawing up plans for the clearance process. The Chief Executive said that although theoretically attractive, it was hard to see what practical purpose this would serve.

Certain concessions, however, were made. The Chief Executive Officer recommended that:

- * A booklet be prepared by the Council, explaining the clearance process, compensation provisions and the right to rehousing. (This booklet, in draft form, has been sent to FLAG for comment before publication).

- * That meetings between ward councillors and the relevant officers would be arranged with groups of residents.

- * That copies of CPO maps and statements of reasons would be available to residents if

requested.

- * That here the Council has prepared a planning 'brief' for redevelopment of a rousing Clearance Area, copies of the brief would be made available in advance of the formal clearance process.

- * That houses acquired under a confirmed CPO would be bricked up as soon as they became empty and acquired by the Council, that complete (or part) terraces would be demolished as quickly as practicable, that - subject to finance availability - the site area would be treated by ashing or soiling and seeding.

- * That street maintenance service in Clearance Areas would continue equitably with other parts of the Borough.

These concessions, original recommendations from the CODE OF CLEARANCE, were granted because "most of the undermentioned items already constitute the Council's administrative practice".



FLAG has doubts about whether all of these concessions are in fact being implemented. To ensure their implementation, all groups are being asked to monitor the situation.

Committee resolution

At the subsequent Planning Committee meeting it was resolved: "That the Federation of Local Action Groups be informed that the Council is

unable to agree ... to the participation of action groups in the execution of the Council's statutory duty under the Housing Act 1957." To sum up, the Council were told by the Chief Executive Officer that there was nothing new in the CODE OF CLEARANCE, or that it already "did it", that participation was impossible and that some issues were ignored completely whilst others were misunderstood.

Press coverage

There was a great deal of publicity in the local press, the 'Burnley Express' and the 'Evening Star' about the CODE OF CLEARANCE. The initial report in the 'Burnley Express' which appeared on the front page under the headline "Residents 'kept in the dark'", was published before the Committee meeting which was to discuss the CODE OF CLEARANCE. This event enabled the Chairman of the Planning and Environment Committee to make comments before any discussions had taken place.

Although the CODE OF CLEARANCE contained recommendations, the press sensationalised the story and hardly mentioned these recommendations. Subsequent press reports were not about the issues raised by the Code or about the Council's reactions to them but about the participation of action groups themselves. One councillor was reported to have said, "I dissociate myself from any action group ... we are running this town. We have been elected to do the job. I am not going to be told by these people or anyone else what I have to do. I think we are allowing these people too much rope. They are now telling us what we must do or must not do." The Housing

Committee Chairman was quoted as saying, "What I find most difficult to comprehend about these groups is just WHO they

represent. I was present at a meeting when an officer of one of the groups stated quite categorically, they only represent 'themselves'. If I appear antagonistic it is because I think that the ordinary person ... is likely to feel overlooked or ignored because everyone's attention appears to be centred on the highly-vocal action groups."

Statement to press

In response, FLAG decided to issue a statement to the press, which was published in full. It seemed, FLAG said, that the Councillors resented not the proposals, but the fact that action groups existed and, what's more, produced well thought out reports and petitions. Action groups were here to stay and would continue to criticise Council policy when necessary. They were not trying to run the town.

Future use for code

At the present time FLAG is still in correspondence with Council officials about var-

ious items in the report and we hope that eventually the Council will come to accept all our recommendations. The importance of the report is illustrated by the fact that FLAG has received requests for copies of the CODE OF CLEARANCE from many parts of the country, from Council officials and educational bodies alike. We have also sent a copy to the Secretary of State for the Environment requesting him to consider using it as a basis for a DoE Circular on how a Clearance Programme should be operated in every local authority area. We hope that groups who read the report or this

article will write to the Secretary of State in support of our request. We also hope that the Code will be of benefit to all who read it, but, most of all, we hope that it will benefit the people who have to suffer distress under the Clearance Programme as it is now operated.

We would welcome comment or criticisms on the Code or the contents of this article. For further information and copies of the CODE OF CLEARANCE (price 20p post paid) please contact the Secretary of FLAG: Dennis Holmes, 41 Accorington Road, Burnley, Lancashire.

THIS ISN'T BLIGHT-IT'S BLITZ !

DERELICTION IN THE STANHOPE ST AREA is a report recently produced by residents, describing the appalling conditions suffered by them in a clearance area. Some of them will live there for a further 3 years until they are rehoused.

The major problems are:

1. Dereliction - fires, flying ash, dust, buildings left in a highly dangerous state

2. Security - residents consider themselves lucky if they leave home for an instant and return to find there have been no intruders

3. Services - some people have had their Rediffusion cut off; other services deteriorate fast

4. General discomfort - slates and rubble are left in the streets, manholes left uncovered, paving stones broken.

The report gives two simple solutions: SPEND MORE MONEY; BETTER ORGANISATION AND CO-ORDINATION BY THE COUNCIL.

Stanhope St Area Action Committee, 54 Darnell St, Newcastle 4. (tel: 39499)

HELP TO SELL 'COMMUNITY ACTION'

We are constantly trying to get the magazine to more tenants and residents associations, community projects, trade unionists and activists.

Could YOU help us by taking extra copies of Community Action to sell direct to tenants groups, friends etc? About 100 people around the country already support Community Action in this way, but we want to at least double this number.

Please fill in the form below. We will send you some C/A posters and information sheets describing C/A aims together with a list of contents of back issues. Each issue of C/A will be sent on a sale or return basis. We must however have payment and unsold copies returned on a regular basis.

Please send me

___ 6 copies of C/A
___ 9 copies of C/A
___ 12 copies of C/A
___ specify

Name _____
Address _____

Community Action, P.O. Box 665, London SW1X 8DZ

AIP~RIP

DEATH of a PROPERTY GIANT

Britain's eighth largest property company, Amalgamated Investment and Property (AIP) collapsed in March. AIP was looking unsteady a year ago. Despite heavy selling during the last 12 months, when AIP sold £30m of properties to help pay back its borrowings of £124m, the company finally ran out of credit with its international bankers. They refused further loans and forced AIP into liquidation. The final straw was that bankers ran out of patience. AIP had an £80m international development programme, including schemes in Paris, Jersey, Holland, Frankfurt and London.

AIP also had more than its share of unlet office blocks:

- 166,000 sq.ft. in the City
- Amalgamated House;
- 250,000 sq.ft. in Basildon;
- 440,000 sq.ft. in Paris.

French connection

It appears that the French banks were the first to withdraw credit, £20m on unfinished offices in Paris. (The falling value of the pound didn't help.) The other banks had to follow suit.

The other main reason for the collapse was that AIP's properties on its balance sheet were heavily overvalued. They were based on 1973 values, ok for the boom days but totally unrealistic in 1976. The fact that there is about 5million square feet of unlet office space in the City (see C/A no. 24, p5) shows how the office market has slumped. So the real value of AIP's assets was much less optimistic, as the banks had found out. So AIP now joins the other bankrupt giants of the property world - Stern, Lyon Group, Guardian Property Co.

The property lobby has been busily denying that other overstretched companies could tumble down the steps to bank-

ruptcy. But shares in Land Securities, Britain's largest property company, fell by 6p after the AIP announcement. And British Land, Capital and Counties and Town and City look really shaky.

AIP owned a mixture of office and residential properties. This included a square mile of St Annes on Sea (Lancs), 3 acres of housing and small industries in Paddington, London.

Neglect

The Star Street/St Michaels Street Tenants Association in Paddington has been campaigning for a housing association to take over AIP's terraced

small property speculators linked to a local estate agent, Mullet, Booker Ltd.

Quick profits

The newcomers hope to make quick capital gains from selling the empty flats and houses. Mortgages are easily available now. Despite AIP's late rush to sell to speculators, two blocks have been acquired by Paddington Churches Housing Association as a result of fierce fighting by the tenants association.

It is a contradiction but even as AIP collapsed the property market is waking up. Experience in Star Street and St Michael Street has shown that both pressures on tenants and



ST. ANNE'S ON SEA: Part of the AIP empire.

houses (Westminster Tory Council wouldn't acquire them). Many were built over 150 years ago and had been neglected for years.

In Paddington AIP took over the old Grand Junction Company. The aim was to demolish and develop another major office scheme near the main line station. But permission was hard to get, then the property market sank. AIP was saddled with sitting tenants protected by the new 1974 Rent Act. So it decided to sell.

AIP started selling, completely against the aims of the tenants association, to newly set up

quick profits from sales are here again.

The end of AIP, caused by its vast uncompleted schemes and unlet offices, shows again how totally wasteful private commercial development are. AIP collapsed in its desire for profit because it was producing developments that no-one wanted.

Unpaid Interest

This year the banks are propping up property companies to the tune of £450m in unpaid interest on loans. The cuts in public spending by the Government look pretty sick by comparison.

REPORTS & THINGS REPORTS & THINGS REPORT

Information and Action Services for Rural Areas:
£1.20 from Dilys Page, Dept of Social Administration and Social Work, University of York, Heslington, York YO1 5DD.
A detailed case study of the mobile information and action van run by the now-axed Cumbria CDP to serve small villages in Cumbria. Useful reading for those concerned with the advice and information needs of people in rural areas.

Legal Aid - how to make the best use of it by the Legal Action Group.
£1.10 (inc. postage) from LAG, 28a Highgate Road, London NW5 1NS.

A guide, designed mainly for solicitors, to the law and practice of the legal aid and advice schemes, but should be useful for those groups running advice centres. Covers civil and criminal schemes, the green form scheme and gives advice on what scheme to use, what advice to give and how to make applications.

SCOTTISH HOUSING "The Unkindest Cut of All". Shelter Information Paper on the Government's Public Expenditure Cuts.
March 1976, 30p plus 10p p. and p. from SHELTER, 6 Castle Street, Edinburgh.
A thorough report, 24 pages long, which gives details of the White Paper cuts. It puts the proposals in the context of the last 10 years with tables of expenditure on various fields of housing, showing the likely effects of the cuts on new building, improvement work and so on.

FUEL DEBTS AND THE POOR. 60p from CPAG, 1 Macklin St, London WC2.

Comprehensive report for Right to Fuel Week, argues that fuel debts are almost inescapable for the poor, and that the planned 'safeguards' for pensioners will not work. Includes the Government's secret instructions to local DHSS offices.

HOUSING IMPROVEMENT HANDBOOK

60p plus 40p postage from Jo Bloor, 9 Queenston Road, Manchester 20.

This 170 page handbook explains and offers suggestions, in plain language, on how residents can get together and set about organising an improvement programme for themselves. It describes ways of forming and running an action group, the technical and political processes involved in getting improvement, how to set up a housing co-operative and where to go for technical help. Excellent value for any group in areas of private housing, it effectively manages to de-mystify much of the technical jargon.

MEMO TO THE REVIEW COMMITTEE ON SUPPLEMENTARY BENEFIT APPEAL TRIBUNALS

from Harlesden Advice Centre, 25 High St, London NW10. Tel. 01-965-2590.

HAC's comments on Appeal Tribunals following a research study done for DHSS. Useful, detailed criticism of the way the system doesn't work. HAC would like to encourage as many groups as possible to make their views known by writing to DHSS Branch SB4, New Court, Carey Street, London WC2A 2LS as this is the first review of the system since the early days of National Assistance.

CLAIMANTS UNION GUIDEBOOK from National Federation of Claimants Unions, 19 Carlyle Road, Ladywood, Birmingham 16.

How to claim, what to claim for, how to organise a Claimants Union. 45 pages on 'How to Fight Back'. Other reports on Social Security and Women, Pensioners, Strikers, etc. also available.

'COMPENSATION': HOUSING ACTION NOTES NO.2

20p per copy or £1.00 for 6 issues from SHELTER Scotland, 6 Castle Street, Edinburgh EH2 3AT.

Details and explanation of law relating to Home Loss Payments, Disturbance Payments, etc. Written for a Scottish audience but the main information is relevant for England and Wales too.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BECOMES BIG BUSINESS 25p plus 15p post. from CDP Information Unit, 5 Tavistock Place, London WC1.

Based on the experience of Coventry CDP, shows how reorganised local government is in the interests of big business. The use of technical reports has largely taken decision making out of the political arena which is accessible to local groups.

SHEFFIELD FREE PRESS No 7 is the first in a new format, intended to make the paper more effective as an independent community paper.

Includes an analysis of a local strike, the Aire Valley 'Public Inquiry', expenditure cuts, a report on the steel industry, the role of local authorities. This issue deals particularly with rates.

8p (plus postage) from Sheffield Outrage Publications, c/o 259 Glossop Rd, Sheffield 10.

EDINBURGH'S OTHER NEWS: 'EON' is produced by tenants groups, community and trade union activists in Edinburgh. 12 pages of news on local and regional issues. 6p plus postage from EON, 11 St. Colme St., Edinburgh Tel: 225 4606

Information Exchange

PROPERTY COMPANIES IN BENWELL

A useful guide for private tenants, which outlines their rights, how to find out who the landlord really is, and gives information on property companies operating in Benwell. Useful research, well written. Available from Benwell Community Project, 87 Adelaide Terrace, Newcastle NE4 8BB.

NORTH-EAST LANCASHIRE STRUCTURE PLAN: COMMENTS BY THE N.E.L. TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP

Gives the reasons for investment in public transport rather than motorways, because of the need for 'accessibility' to facilities rather than 'mobility'. Useful for anyone fighting for improved transport facilities and against motorway development. 20p plus postage from NELTAG, 2 Sussex Street, Burnley, Lancs.

PHAS(Public Health Advisory Service)Practice Notes Care House, Bigland Street, London E1(01-790-4507)

PHAS have produced a set of 10 'Practice Notes' on key housing and public health issues. They explain the law in clear terms and how to take action. The Notes include examples of letters to write, reports to do, and so on. The duties of local authorities are explained. The notes cover : Statutory Nuisance(Section 99, Public Health Act 1936); Clearance and redevelopment; Disrepair and unfitness; Overcrowding; Houses in Multiple Occupation; Compulsory Improvement; Lodging Houses. They also cover Rats, Mice and Pigeons, Refuse, and Noise Abatement. Prices range from 25p to 40p. Also from PHAS: other public health reports and transcripts of key court actions.

"The Leveller - the new radical examiner" 30p from 91 Grove Lane, London SE5

The pilot issue of this new radical magazine covers a wide range of issues including: workers' co-ops, a report on the tobacco companies, international news, and a founding statement. The magazine is planned to appear regularly from the autumn. Meanwhile, the people who planned the pilot are seeking founding subscribers who will pay £20 and take part in developing the magazine's policy.

Special offer!

Package of all back issues of Community Action Nos. 5,6,9 to 24 for £3.40 - save 38p! From CA ...see form on page 40.

GRADUAL RENEWAL IN LEEDS

Gives good examples of the arguments to use in favour of gradual renewal programmes and a flexible and relevant approach to housing clearance and improvement. Describes Jericho District of Oxford where flexibility used successfully. Report by The Community Housing Working Party, c/o The Poplars Fink Hall, Horsforth, Leeds. (unpriced)

LIVERPOOL SUMMER

Lots of imaginative ideas for kids summer projects are in this report of an experimental 6-week theatre/arts workshop held last summer for Liverpool kids. Free from Liverpool Rathbone Community Association, 176 High Park St., Liverpool 8, but send S.A.E.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO COUNCIL HOUSING. £1.10 plus 30p post from CDP Information Unit, 5 Tavistock Place, London WC1.

Examines in detail the development of council housing since 1919 to the present day. Shows how it has been expanded then cutback. Includes seven very useful local studies of council housing in Coventry, Newcastle, Newham, Paisley, Batley, North Shields and Southwark. Must be read.

THE COST OF HOUSING: NEWHAM 1976 Free with s.a.e. from Newham Action Committee, c/o 57 Barking Rd, London E.16.

Excellent pamphlet explaining the real causes of the increased costs of council housing both nationally and in Newham. It has been widely distributed in the Borough. The idea and the tactics should be copies by other groups.

INVESTIGATORS HANDBOOK

A guide for tenants, workers and action groups on how to investigate companies, organisations and individuals. Details hundreds of sources of information and explains where to find it, how to use it. Only 30p (inc post.) from Community Action, P.O.Box 665, London SW1X 8DZ

PLAYLEADER

An experienced second play leader is wanted for an Adventure Playground/detached youth work team. The playground is in the Pill area of Newport and is managed by a local independent voluntary group. Salary £2,395 (negotiable). Driving license handy. Apply as soon as possible. Further details from PCPA, 1, Albert Street, Newport, Gwent. Tel: Newport 211510.

WORKER

INTER-ACTION, a co-operative community arts trust based in Kentish Town London, is looking for a second member for its community media division to develop new video projects. Experience with video, youth/community and groupwork desirable. Ability to work on own initiative essential. Further details from John Callaghan on 01-267-1422.

Workers Wanted

Three experienced full-time workers to be based in established Community Advice Centre in the multi-racial inner city area of Bristol. To include qualified/unqualified community/social workers, administrative assistant/secretary. For further details please apply to - Chairman of the Management Committee, St. Paul's Advice Centre, Albert Villa, 146 Grosvenor Road, Bristol 2.

Youth Worker

Have you had experience of working with young people - in youth clubs and on the streets in involving local adults in this work and co-ordinating, supporting and training volunteers? If so, there's a job for you at BLACKFRIARS SETTLEMENT. Ring or write to Nikki Henriques 01-928-9521, 44 Nelson-Square, London SE1 0QA for further details.

CO-ORDINATOR

Co-ordinator wanted in Milton Keynes by the North Bucks Community Transport Association to run a voluntary based second-hand furniture supply service. He/she will be expected to recruit volunteers, organise furniture repair and transport, and undertake general administration of the service. Salary £2,300-£2,800, possibility of rental housing available. Further details from Alar Thomas, 33 Osborne Street, Wolverton, Milton Keynes, Bucks (MK313251)

CO-OP

A tenants co-operative beginning in Manchester would like to hear from anybody with some architectural/surveying/clerk of works skills who would be willing to help them get started. They would have to work voluntarily at first but payment may be available when the houses are purchased. There would be ample opportunity to join in with all other aspects of creating a co-op, to help other groups forming co-ops, and to pass on skills to co-op members. Please write to Birch Housing Co-op, 9 Slade Lane, Longsight, Manchester 13.

 ★ There seems to be some confusion about our policy on adverts. We do NOT accept ads from local ★
 ★ authorities or any organisation which can afford to advertise elsewhere. We will always give ★
 ★ preference to ads for jobs controlled by local residents for which 'non-professionals' can ★
 ★ apply. All ads we accept are free to community groups. We can't notify people whose ads we ★
 ★ don't accept unless stamped addressed envelope is sent with the ad. But, we retain the right ★
 ★ to reject ads for reasons of space or because they don't fit in with our policy. All ads must ★
 ★ be free of jargon and indicate the actual salaries rather than saying, eg. "equivalent to AP3". ★
 ★ We do NOT have an "advertising department". ★

Subscribe to Community Action

.... INVESTIGATORS HANDBOOK @ 30p each

.... SUBSCRIPTION (£1.20 for 6 issues or more if you can afford
 1t. £1.50 abroad. £2.00 to libraries, local authorities,
 businesses, etc. Single copies 18p+9p postage).
 Start with issue No.

... BACK ISSUES OF COMMUNITY ACTION: issues Nos. 5, 6, and
 9-18 @ 15p each +9p postage for single copy, 5p per
 copy for more than one back issue. No. 19 onwards 18p
 each + postage. Package of all back issues costs £3.40.
 Specify Nos.

COMMUNITY ACTION
 P.O. Box 665
 London SW1 8DZ

NAME
 ADDRESS
 POST CODE I enclose a
 cheque/PO for.....